

## Does the Law of Moses Apply to Me?

### Does the Law of Moses Apply to Me?

*Summarizing the Five Main Views on the Law and the Christian\**

Should you as a Christian tithe? Work on Saturday? Charge interest to Jews? Eat meat and drink milk in the same meal? The Pentateuch addresses these, but believers today debate whether the law applies to believers today. This chart summarizes five views on this crucial issue.

	Theonomic Greg Bahnsen	Reformed Willem VanGemeren	Weightier Issues Walter C. Kaiser	Modified Lutheran Douglas J. Moo	Dispensational Wayne G. Strickland
What is the Law?	Same definition as the views 3-5	God's oral or written instructions since creation	The whole Mosaic law given in the Pentateuch (Genesis to Deuteronomy) but also amplified in the rest of the Old Testament	Believers (Israel and Church)	Israel only (Israel ≠ Church)
Who is the Law for?	The Elect (Israel = Church)	All mankind (Israel = Church)	Believers (Israel and Church)	Believers (Israel and Church)	Israel only (Israel ≠ Church)
Which parts of the Law apply today?	All moral laws apply to people of God only in every age; therefore, all elect persons since creation should observe either the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday, before Christ) or "Christian Sabbath," (Sunday, after Christ)	All moral laws apply to believers and unbelievers of every age (e.g., all persons—including unbelieving Gentiles since creation—should observe the Sabbath or "Christian Sabbath," being Sunday)	All moral laws that stem from God's character: • 10 Commandments • Leviticus 18–19 (sex) (i.e., Sabbath is required since Israel's nationhood and prohibited sexual practices still apply)	As with dispensationalists, the Mosaic law is abolished in its entirety; however, its moral content provides good guidelines for Christian living, though Christ holds the final say through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in believers today; Sabbath obedience is not consistently applied (?)	God's "moral law" before Moses is now called the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2) and governs believers through the Spirit's new covenant indwelling; The Law does not easily divide into "parts" and is done away with in its entirety (Rom. 7:1-6; 1 Cor. 9:19-21; Heb. 8:13), including the Sabbath (Col. 2:16-17)
• Civil laws? (i.e., judicial law)	All apply (e.g., laws today should require death for adultery)	Some apply (e.g., still tithe and don't charge believers interest)	Judicial principles (not laws) apply since moral laws underlie all judicial and ceremonial laws	Only principles apply now as the Mosaic law was given only to Israel	None apply as these regulated Israel alone (but principles such as love and compassion still apply)
• Ceremonial laws?	All five views agree that ceremonial aspects such as the MC was added to the AC; Both are God's "covenant of grace." They consist of the same substance of God's saving relationship which makes the MC still apply today	MC was given both still apply though they are similar in substance but different in form and purpose	MC was given specifically to Israel but its moral principles are still relevant to all believers under the AC	Like dispensationalists, MC was conditional but AC was not; MC as a temporary framework prescribed terms of obedience for Israel in Law period	MC regulated Israel's life so she could experience the blessings of the AC, but MC is no longer operative as it is fulfilled in Christ
What is the relationship of the Abrahamic Covenant to Mosaic Covenant?	Both are God's "covenant of grace." They consist of the same substance of God's saving relationship which makes the MC still apply today	MC was given both still apply though they are similar in substance but different in form and purpose	MC was given specifically to Israel but its moral principles are still relevant to all believers under the AC	Like dispensationalists, MC was conditional but AC was not; MC as a temporary framework prescribed terms of obedience for Israel in Law period	MC regulated Israel's life so she could experience the blessings of the AC, but MC is no longer operative as it is fulfilled in Christ

\* This chart summarizes Stanley N. Gundry, ed. *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), where each author presents his view and responds to the other four views. Generally speaking, views 1-2 are similar as both are Reformed (stressing continuity between the NT and OT) and these stand against views 3-5 which are alike in stressing discontinuity. In my opinion, the dispensational view has the most to commend it as law in the NT is never broken into component parts and this view clearly distinguishes Israel from the church. Further, it is inconsistent to change the Sabbath (Saturday) to Sunday but not apply the OT penalties for Sabbath-breaking today (i.e., death by stoning; cf. Exod. 31:14-15; 35:2).

11-Oct-18

Does the Law of Moses Apply to Me (2 of 2)?

Does the Law of Moses Apply to Me? (2 of 2)  
Evaluating the Five Main Views on the Law and the Christian

	Theonomic Greg Bahnsen	Reformed Willem VanGemeren	Weightier Issues Walter C. Kaiser	Modified Lutheran Douglas J. Moo	Dispensational Wayne G. Strickland
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuity between the OT and NT upheld</li> <li>Desires ethics to relate to all of life</li> <li>Sees positive aspects of the law</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuity between the OT and NT upheld</li> <li>Notes Mosaic law's foreshadowing of Christ</li> <li>Sees a convicting role of the law today for unbelievers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biblical support for some law aspects (i.e., moral) being weightier than others (Matt. 23:23)</li> <li>Holiness Code of Leviticus 18-19 stem from nature of God</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accounts for new covenant emphases under the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2)</li> <li>Says OT laws repeated in the NT are applicable</li> <li>Applies law principles today</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biblical in that Mosaic law began at Sinai and ended with Christ's death as a temporary custodian or tutor (Gal. 3:19, 24-25)</li> <li>Clearly distinguishes between Israel and church</li> <li>Advocates continued guidance in law of Christ</li> </ul>
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dividing law as moral, civil &amp; ceremonial not biblically supported</li> <li>Misguided to apply godly commands to unregenerate man</li> <li>All "law" need not be Mosaic (natural law and law of Christ also exist)</li> <li>The NT never applies the OT to civil matters</li> <li>Law condemned man (2 Cor. 3:9)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dividing law as moral, civil &amp; ceremonial not biblically supported</li> <li>Use of "law" in differing ways inconsistent &amp; confusing</li> <li>Requiring Sabbath for today contradicts NT (Col. 2:16-17)</li> <li>Unclear if moral law became law of Christ</li> <li>Merges Israel and church</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dividing law as moral, civil &amp; ceremonial not biblically supported</li> <li>Arbitrary to pick and choose which parts of the law are required</li> <li>Choice of Decalogue and Lev. 18-19 too narrow for moral law</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seeks to teach the indivisibility of the law while upholding its moral content</li> <li>Too extreme to claim that the law has absolutely no purpose today</li> <li>Fails to see the gospel in the OT by demarcating Law and Gospel into distinct, discontinuous eras</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distinguishing law's revelatory aspects (eternal, revealing God's nature) from regulatory (temporary, ruled Israel) makes distinctions within an inseparable code—if the OT law is essentially a unity, then why divide it into two parts?</li> <li>The law is not nullified but actually upheld by faith (Rom. 3:31)</li> </ul>

Spectrum on Degree of Applicability\*

Law as fully applicable in every sense

Theonomic  
Reformed  
Weightier Issues  
Modified Lutheran  
Dispensational

Law as fully abolished in every sense

\* Adapted from Lee Hwee Chin, "The Applicability of the Law Today," unpublished research paper for the course "Old Testament Survey," Singapore Bible College, 2001), 1.

## Should Christians Follow the Ten Commandments?

Adapted from my 1990 dissertation, "The Eschatological Significance of the Sabbath," Dallas Seminary, 148-53

Despite the popularity of the belief that the Law is presently valid for believers, the New Testament treats the entire law as abrogated.<sup>1</sup> This is a major tenant of the Book of Galatians, written in response to the error of supposing that some of the law was still in effect. Paul's readers were falsely led into believing that *most* of the law was abrogated (e.g., the sacrificial system, dietary laws, etc.), but *specific* laws remained, particularly circumcision. Paul forcefully took issue with such teaching:

Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again, I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law (Gal. 5:2-3).

The issue to be emphasized here is Paul's view of the law as a whole. His point is that if one must keep *any* part of it, he must keep *all* of it. Conversely stated, if the believer is free from the law, he is free from *all* of it. This applies whether the part referred to is circumcision, the Sabbath, or any other part.<sup>2</sup>

The Pauline epistles uphold abolishing the *entire* law, not only part of it. Paul affirmed emphatically that believers are dead to the law (Rom. 7:1-6) and not under its rule (Rom. 6:14; Gal. 3:19, 23-29; 4:25, 31; 5:18). This is because Christ is the fulfillment (cf. Matt. 5:17-18) and termination or end of the law (Rom. 10:4) since His death abolished the law (Eph. 2:15). Further, Paul taught that the Mosaic Covenant had passed away (2 Cor. 3:6-11) and that the Abrahamic Covenant both preceded and followed the period of the law since the law served only temporarily (Gal. 3:14-25). The result is that "now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law" (Gal. 3:25). Also, "the fact that God has (manifestly) accepted Gentiles as sons demonstrates that the period of the law is at an end; the custodian has finished his task, and the son has become an heir (4:1-6)."<sup>3</sup> Finally, in 1 Corinthians 9:20, Paul very clearly declares himself free from the law:

To the Jews, I became like a Jew to win the Jews. To those under the law, I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) to win those under the law.

Paul could not have stated more clearly that he was not under the law. He makes the same claim for his Roman readers as well: "You are not under the law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). The preceding verses represent only a select group of passages that indicate that the law has been abolished and thus has no jurisdiction over the believer. Indeed, when comparing the Mosaic dispensation with "the dispensation in Christ, Paul found the former, glorious as it had been, to be worthless."<sup>4</sup>

### Paul and the Decalogue

While many passages have been cited above to show the end of the law, those most pertinent to the present study are two texts explicitly pointing to the end of the Ten Commandments in the present age. The first text is Romans 7. Here, Paul emphatically states that the believer has died to the law by being joined to Christ (v. 4) with the result that he is released from the law (v. 6). His following illustration specifies this "law" as the Decalogue refers to the tenth commandment which prohibits coveting (vv. 7f.). The purpose of this prohibition was to reveal Israel's inability to obey the law of God. Specifically, Paul claims freedom from the law because it has already fulfilled its purpose in exposing sin. Further, since the Decalogue is an essential unity, the abolition of one of its commandments (coveting) shows the abolition of them all.<sup>5</sup> In other words, since his illustration denotes that believers are free from *one* of the Ten

<sup>1</sup>Douglas J. Moo, "Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law," *JSNT* 20 (February 1984): 3-49; Roy L. Aldrich, "Causes for Confusion of Law and Grace," *BS* 116 (July-September 1959): 221-29; id., "Has the Mosaic Law Been Abolished?" 322-35; id., "The Mosaic Ten Commandments Compared to Their Restatements in the New Testament," *BS* 118 (July-September 1961): 251-58.

<sup>2</sup>One may object to this reasoning based upon that fact that Paul used circumcision (in the so-called ceremonial law) rather than the Sabbath (in the so-called moral law), but Paul's teaching on the present applicability of the Ten Commandments is noted later in this discussion.

<sup>3</sup>Douglas R. de Lacey, "The Sabbath/Sunday Question and the Law in the Pauline Corpus," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation.*, ed. D. A. Carson, 159-95 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 166.

<sup>4</sup>E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 144.

<sup>5</sup>This is certainly not to say that believers are now free to covet, for this is prohibited elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., James 4:2). What Paul means is that the prohibition of coveting in the Decalogue revealed man's

Commandments, and the Decalogue is a unity, it follows that believers are also free from *all* of the commandments, which includes the Sabbath.

Second Corinthians 3 is a second passage that even more clearly shows the believer's freedom from the Ten Commandments. In this chapter, Paul contrasts his apostolic authority as a minister of the New Covenant with that of his opponents at Corinth who, by implication, were ministers of the Old Covenant (cf. 2:17; 3:14). One reason the New Covenant is more glorious than the Old is because this New Covenant is internal, written on men's hearts through the Person or activity of the Spirit (3:3b).<sup>6</sup> Conversely, the Old Covenant was engraved upon tablets of stone (3:3, 7). The crucial issue here is *what* was written on stone in the Old Testament. Was it the entire law? No, only the Ten Commandments were engraved upon the tablets at Sinai (Deut. 4:13; 5:22).<sup>7</sup> In other words, Paul equates the Old Covenant with the Decalogue.<sup>8</sup> This law had a fading glory (i.e., lacked permanent validity)<sup>9</sup> "because only in Christ is it taken away" (v. 14b). Therefore, since Paul contrasts his continuing ministry of blessing with the ministry of cursing in the Ten Commandments, he in effect teaches the abolishment of the Decalogue as a system by which one should live, including the Sabbath.<sup>10</sup> That the Sabbath is included within this abolished Decalogue also is supported in that the New Testament never enforces the death penalty for disobeying the Ten Commandments.<sup>11</sup> It is inconsistent to argue for the continuance of the Sabbath requirement in the present age without a continued penalty for neglecting it.

---

inability to follow God's commands.

<sup>6</sup>Bernardin Schneider, "The Meaning of St. Paul's Antithesis 'The Letter and the Spirit,'" *CBQ* 15 (1953): 193-207.

<sup>7</sup>Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, GCS, 428. See also Exodus 24:12; 31:18; 32:15-16 for other verses mentioning the tablets. Many argue that Paul's reference to "tablets of stone" serves as a figurative designation for the entire law or Old Covenant (e.g., Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB, 200; Bultmann, 73-75; Frederick W. Danker, *II Corinthians*, ACNT, 54; Colin Kruse, *The Second Epistle of the Paul to the Corinthians*, TNTC, 91-93; Knofel Staton, *Second Corinthians*, SBS, 56-57). However, the passage compares in graphic terms the actual writing (content) on the cold, external tablets with that "written" on the warm, internal heart; thus, the comparison drawn is between the Decalogue and that which replaces it—the work of the Spirit in the inner man. However, even if the tablets represent the *entire* law (the Old Covenant is the implied contrast in verse 6 and specifically mentioned in verse 14), this still argues for the abolition of the Sabbath as part of that law.

<sup>8</sup>De Lacey, "The Sabbath/Sunday Question and the Law in the Pauline Corpus," 167.

<sup>9</sup>Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians*, Interp., 31.

<sup>10</sup>Even Paul's statement that circumcision is nothing but rather what matters is "keeping the commandments of God" (1 Cor. 7:19) is inadequate proof that believers are to keep the Ten Commandments. There is no evidence that "commandments of God" refers exclusively or even primarily to the Decalogue (C. K. Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 169; de Lacey, "The Sabbath/Sunday Question and the Law in the Pauline Corpus," 176). Objection to the preceding presentation of Paul's view of the Decalogue may also be based upon his appeal to the fifth commandment in Ephesians 6:1-3. However, here, the primary motive for children obeying their parents is not the Decalogue, but because this is part of one's calling in Christ (4:1) and is right (v. 1b). The appeal to the Ten Commandments is at best a third motivation (ibid., 176).

<sup>11</sup>For an evaluation of the penalties for each of the Ten Commandments, see Aldrich, "The Mosaic Ten Commandments Compared to Their Restatements in the New Testament," 251-58. He shows how the believer is not under the Decalogue, but instead "he is under the eternal moral law of God which demands far more than the Ten Commandments. It calls for nothing less than conformity to the character of God" (p. 257).

## Fulfilling the Law (Matt. 5:17-18)

The preceding four pages in these notes explain the end of the Law at the death of Jesus. However, some problem texts seem to indicate the continuity of the law and the Ten Commandments. The most quoted verses in this respect are Christ's words in Matthew 5:17-18:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and 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.

At first glance, it appears Jesus said the law would be in effect until the new heavens and earth. Equally tricky is Paul's statement in Romans 3:31 that faith does not nullify the law, but rather, one should "uphold the law." This law is deemed later in Romans as "holy, righteous, and good" (7:12). Similarly, Paul expresses a positive attitude towards law keeping in Galatians 1:14 and Philippians 3:4-6.

A closer look indicates that the above passages can be reconciled with the many texts that reveal the abolishment of the law in the present age. First, the proper interpretation of what Jesus meant in Matthew 5:17-18 must be addressed.<sup>12</sup> Because Jesus seems to have abrogated the entire law by His abrogation of the laws of clean and unclean (Mark 7:19), one could rightly wonder how He came not to abolish the law. Some suppose that He abolished only the ceremonial and civil law while confirming the moral law,<sup>13</sup> but this fails to account for the continuance of the all-inclusive "not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen" (v. 18; NASB).

The proper interpretation of Jesus' statement lies in considering precisely what Jesus said would not be abolished. He did not refer to the Law (Mosaic Code); He said He came not to abolish the "Law or the Prophets." The formula "the Law and/or the Prophets" refers not to a moral, ceremonial, or civil code but was a standard designation by the Jews of Jesus' day to refer to the Old Testament canon as a whole.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, in this saying, Christ claimed that He did not come to abolish the Old Testament as canon. Paul agreed that in the new dispensation the Old Testament would continue to be relevant for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16); therefore, the time in which Israel was related to God by the Torah would cease with John (Matt. 11:13). Rather than setting aside the Scripture as His opponents accused, Christ came to carry it out in complete obedience; the Old Testament pointed to Him as the One who would completely fulfill God's commands.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the issue here is not how long the law would remain in effect as the guiding covenant for Israel. Instead, the issue is whether the Old Testament would remain authoritative as canon. With this interpretation in mind, Jesus' claim here is entirely consistent with the abrogation of the law taught in the rest of the New Testament.

---

<sup>12</sup>For a discussion of critical viewpoints on this verse see D. A. Carson, "Matthew," EBC, 8:142-44; W. D. Davies, "Matthew 5:17, 18," in *Christian Origins and Judaism*, 31-66.

<sup>13</sup>For example, see David Wenham, "Jesus and the Law: an Exegesis of Matthew 5:17-20," *Themelios* 4 (1979): 92-96.

<sup>14</sup>Matt. 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; 24:14; 28:23; Rom. 3:21. Other designations include "the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44) or simply "Law" (Matt. 5:18; John 10:34; 12:34; 15:25; 1 Cor. 14:21; cf. Carson, EBC, 8:142; D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1:184, 187; Richard E. Clark, "An Exegesis of the Ten Commandments," Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1972, 68-69).

<sup>15</sup>This interpretation is consistent with Matthew's use of πληρῶν ("fulfill"; e.g., Matt. 2:15; 11:13), which refers to the prophetic nature of the Old Testament. When Christ came as the eschatological fulfillment of the Law, "the Law lost its main function of pointing ahead; it ceased to hold the center of the stage. Jesus, not the Law, is now the center of the Christian's (and Mt's) attention, devotion, and obedience—and that includes moral observance" (John P. Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel*, 87). For elaboration of this view see Carson, EBC, 8:143-44; Lloyd-Jones, 1:185-86; Robert Banks, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law: Authenticity and Interpretation in Matthew 5:17-20," *JBL* 93 (1974): 226-42, esp. 242; Moo, "Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law," 3-49.