

Jesus and Law

Notes, Thoughts and 'Answers'.

A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Lev 19:1-19 (20-37)	Exodus 20: 1-17	Matthew 5:17-48	Romans 3:19-31	Galatians 5:1-26

Hear this Passage.

Read Matthew 5:17-20

This is the key passage. Jesus' words here draw the OT law into the new covenant era – albeit fleshed out and delineated.

The key to this is what does the word 'fulfil' mean.

More of this in Q3 below.

Explain the Topic.

- 1. Read all of Leviticus 19. What strikes you about this list? How does it relate to modern 'law'? What would be the effect if all the world lived by these rules?**

I find the range of laws in this chapter quite amazing. There is everything here from work health and safety, to ritual, to labour relations, commercial transactions, agricultural advice and family relationships.

Chris Wright (New Bible Commentary) summarises: *"This great chapter stands among the richest seams of OT ethics, along with passages like Dt. 23-25; Ps. 15; Am. 5; Mi. 6:6-8; Jb. 31; Ezk. 18; and Is. 58. It will richly reward close study using a cross-reference Bible, since many of its laws are expanded further in Deuteronomy and echoed in the Psalms, Proverbs and Prophets. It includes and expands all of the Ten Commandments in one way or another, and also condenses them into what Jesus called the second great commandment in the law and Paul regarded as its very essence: Love your neighbour as yourself"*

(18:cf. Mt. 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10). With its definitive opening (2), sweeping conclusion (37) and pithy, memorable style, it probably functioned as an easily taught and learned catechism of familial and social responsibilities. It is a chapter which strongly influenced the moral priorities of Jesus' teaching and also lies behind some of the letter of James."

2. Read Mark 12:28-34. What does Jesus say about the commandments?

In this exchange Jesus gives his summary of the Law.

Two components basically

Love God

Love Your Neighbour.

Wessel and Strauss (EBC) note:

"In answer to the question, Jesus quotes two passages from the OT (Dt 6:4-5; Lev 19:18). Deuteronomy 6:4 ("Hear O Israel ...") represents the opening words of the Shema, a confession of faith that is recited by pious Jews every morning and evening. ... God is to be loved completely and totally (v. 30) because he, and he alone, is God and because he has made a covenant of love with his people ... Deuteronomy 6:5 speaks of "heart," "soul," and "strength." Jesus adds a fourth: "mind." Both expressions indicate the same thing. A person's entire being is to be devoted to God. Jesus brought Leviticus 19:18 together with Deuteronomy 6:5 to show that love of neighbor is a natural and logical outgrowth of love for God. ... Thus although the teacher of the law had asked for the one most important commandment, Jesus gave him two.

In relation to neighbor note:

In his parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus redefined the term to mean anyone with whom we have dealings, even a hated enemy (Lk 10:25-37). Mitton, 99, in a most practical

application of this verse, remarks: [Neighbor embraces] all within our home, those we meet at work, in our church, and in recreations. And more than that: our employer is our neighbor too; so are our work people, all who serve us in shops, the men who empty our dust bins and those who try to keep streets and parks clean. So too are the people of Jamaica, of West Africa, of Kenya, of Germany and of Russia. If we love our neighbors as we love ourselves, we shall want for them the treatment we should want for ourselves, were we in their place.

3. Read Matthew 5:17-20. What does Jesus say he has come to do about the Law? Note the examples he gives in the antitheses that follow (v21-48).

As mentioned above this is an essential passage for understanding this topic.

Wilkins: *"This is an increasingly clear indication of the arrival of those new covenant promises. The prophet Ezekiel had prophesied:*

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezek. 36:25-27; cf. Jer. 31:31-34)

Jesus guides his disciples into the true intention of God's law, which focuses on inner righteousness as opposed to mere external righteousness. They gain entrance to the kingdom by repenting and confessing their sins (cf. 3:1-6; 4:17), which allows the Spirit to enter into their life to bring purification through applying Jesus' atoning righteousness to their heart. In this way, Jesus' disciples are more righteous than the scribes and the Pharisees, because they have received regeneration as they enter the kingdom."

Carson: *"The best interpretation of these difficult verses says that Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets in that they point to him, and he is their fulfillment. The antithesis is not between "abolish" and "keep" but between "abolish" and "fulfill." "For Matthew, then, it is not the question of Jesus' relation to the law that is in doubt but rather its relation to him!"*

Note also these wise words from Wilkins (NIVAC: Matthew)
"The issues surrounding the Christian's relationship to the Old Testament Scripture (Law) are complex. Some contend that none of it applies to Jesus unless it is explicitly reaffirmed in the New Testament, while others say that all of the Old Testament applies unless it is explicitly revoked in the New Testament. Both of these extremes should be avoided in the light of Jesus' statements in 5:17–20. While these issues are beyond what we can address here, some basic principles can be suggested.

(1) The law is a revelation of God's will for humanity. It reveals a standard of God's perfect righteousness. We trifle with God's will if we set aside some aspects of his Word. For example, it may be commendable to oppose abortions, but when antiabortion activists resort to violence and murder, they have set aside God's commands.

(2) We need to understand God's purpose for giving his law if we are to rightly understand the law itself. The law had several purposes. It was designed to instruct God's people in his will so that they might fulfill his purpose for them as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). But they were not to rely on its requirements as the means of finding forgiveness (Ps. 51:14–17). The law was given to point out humanity's sinfulness and need for God (Rom. 7:7) and to lead humanity to Christ, by whom they will be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24).

(3) When reading the Gospels in general and the antitheses in particular (Matt. 5:21–48), we must keep in mind that Jesus is here objecting to misinterpretations of the law, not the law itself. A tendency existed in Pharisaic Judaism to make their

interpretations and traditions just as binding as the law itself. Jesus rejected their practices, not the law. He continued to uphold the law as the will of God.

(4) Jesus fulfilled the law and proved to be the perfect God-man, who is therefore able to become the means of our justification or right standing with God (Matt. 5:17–20; Rom. 5:18–21; Heb. 5:7–10). Therefore, we are not under the law as a means of gaining salvation.

(5) At the same time, Jesus is the interpreter of the law, showing what is binding principle and what is the temporary symbolic ritual (Matt. 12:1–8; Heb. 9:11–10:13). We should seek Christ's mind for a proper interpretation and application of the law and understand the Old Testament in the light of the new covenant he inaugurates. He emphasized that ultimately the law was given to aid humans to live life the way God intended it to be lived, not to keep us under a binding set of religious rules (Matt. 12:3–5, 9–14). As Jesus gives his interpretation of the law, he reveals its intent and motive that were lost behind the external legalism of the scribes and Pharisees. He then demonstrates how principles of the law are valid guidelines to show God's will for his people (5:21–48).

(6) Jesus demonstrates that the entire Old Testament hangs on love for God and neighbor (22:38–39), which truly brings to fulfillment all of the Law. The "law of love" becomes an important key to determine how the Christian is to live out the will of God (5:21, 27, 38, etc.)."

Explore the Topic.

- 1. What does Romans 3:19-31 tell us about the relationship of the gospel to salvation?**

The key verse here is v21.

Romans up to this point has been proving that all mankind, Jew and Gentile, are sinners rightly facing God's wrath. But then comes the BUT.

But God ... it is God's righteousness that has been made known.

Moo (NBC): "Paul's point is that a new era in God's plan has arrived now and that his way of bringing people into relationship with himself takes place outside the confines of that old era, of which the Mosaic law was a central component. But Paul is careful at the same time to emphasize the continuity in God's plan. God's righteousness may not take place within the old era, or covenant; but the law and the prophets of that covenant testify to it."

Consider also Ephesians 2:8-10

- 2. Note 1 Samuel 15:22, Micah 6: 6-8, Hosea 6:6 and Psalm 51:14-17. What do these verses say to us in regard to the OT law?**

Even in the Old Testament the ritual laws and the practise of them was not an end in itself – They were meant to be symbols of allegiance and obedience to Yahweh.

Baldwin comments on 1 Samuel 15 (TOTC): "In a memorable prophetic utterance, Samuel pronounces for all time the futility of attempting to rely on ritual sacrifice when what is required is obedience. No ceremonial can make up for a rebellious attitude to God and his commandments, because obstinate resistance to God exalts self-will to the place of authority, which belongs only to God."

Note also Isaiah 1:11 and Malachi 1:10

3. **Look at Ezekiel 36:24-28 and Jeremiah 31:31-34? What does the Lord God say he is going to do about sin and the law?**

In both these passages a new era is foretold in which the 'law' becomes internalised, when people will be empowered, by God, to live in accordance with His wishes.

Harrison on the Jeremiah passage (TOTC): "***The new covenant.*** *The Mosaic covenant will not be sufficiently flexible for the new age of divine grace, and so will be replaced. The new covenant will be written deeply into the wills of the Israelites, who will obey it by choice rather than by compulsion. Past apostasy will be replaced by an attitude of fidelity to God, so that never again will the nation be in bondage to others. Jeremiah insists that apostasy is at the root of all Israel's troubles.*"

4. **"Should the law be divided into three parts—moral, ceremonial, and civil—such that the ceremonial and civil have been fulfilled by Christ, but the moral continues on into today?" * Discuss**

This quite comes from Justin Taylor: '**The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise**' on the Gospel Coalition (USA) website which is a 'summary' of an article by David Dorsey (I have reproduced the entire summary below).

Ceremonial, civil and moral is a common way of looking at the OT laws. The argument sometimes goes that Jesus fulfils the ceremonial and civil and we are left with the moral law seen as summed up in the Ten Commandments.

The David Dorsey article is not so sure and notes:

1. *The scheme of a tripartite division is unknown both in the Bible and in early rabbinic literature.*
2. *The categorizing of certain selected laws as "moral" is methodologically questionable.*

3. *The attempt to formulate this special category in order to "save" for NT Christians a handful of apparently universally-applicable laws—particularly the ones quoted in the NT—is an unnecessary effort. There is a more logical, Biblically supported approach to the law that retains for Christians not only the very heart of the so-called "moral" laws but also the underlying moral truths and principles, indeed the very spirit, of every one of the 613 laws.*

Live it out.

1. **So! Tattoos, pork, sabbaths, polyester/cotton T-shirts, unjust wages, adultery, animal sacrifices. What do you do about these things?**

Worth having a look back at Leviticus 19. How do we decide which we are going to keep?

Remember: Love God, Love Your Neighbour.

2. **What basic principle can you discern about the relationship of Jesus' Kingdom and the Law?**

Remember: Love God, Love Your Neighbour.

I have added below a couple of condensed articles to help you think through this issue. In preparing for this I have accumulated lots more material – If you are interested just ask.

Greg Holmes

The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise

JANUARY 2, 2015 | [Justin Taylor](#)

A Q&A summary with David Dorsey's essay, "[The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise](#)," *JETS* 34 (1991): 321-34:

What was the purpose or design of the law of Moses?

1. The corpus was designed to regulate the lives of a people living in the distinctive geographical and climatic conditions found in the southern Levant, and many of the regulations are inapplicable, unintelligible, or even nonsensical outside that regime.
2. The corpus was designed by God to regulate the lives of a people whose cultural milieu was that of the ancient Near East.
3. The Mosaic corpus was intended to regulate the lives of people whose religious milieu was that of the ancient Near Eastern world (particularly Canaan) and would be more or less inapplicable outside that world.
4. The code of laws was issued by God to lay the detailed groundwork for and regulate the various affairs of an actual politically- and geographically-defined nation.
5. The corpus was formulated to establish and maintain a cultic regime that has been discontinued with the Church (cf. Heb 8:18; etc.).

Should the law be divided into three parts—moral, ceremonial, and civil—such that the ceremonial and civil have been fulfilled by Christ, but the moral continues on into today?

4. The scheme of a tripartite division is unknown both in the Bible and in early rabbinic literature.
5. The categorizing of certain selected laws as "moral" is methodologically questionable.
6. The attempt to formulate this special category in order to "save" for NT Christians a handful of apparently universally-applicable laws—particularly the ones quoted in the NT—is an unnecessary effort. There is a more logical, Biblically supported approach to the law that retains for Christians not only the very heart of the so-called "moral" laws but also the underlying moral truths and principles, indeed the very spirit, of every one of the 613 laws.

What role does the Mosaic law play in the lives of Christians today?

"Having suggested that the Mosaic law in its entirety be removed from the backs of Christians in one sense, I would propose that the corpus be placed back into their hands in another sense: the entire corpus—not just the 'moral' laws but all 613—moral, ceremonial, civil. If on the one hand the evidence strongly suggests that the corpus is no longer legally binding upon Christians, there is equally strong evidence in the NT that all 613 laws are profoundly binding upon Christians in a revelatory and pedagogical sense."

How then do we apply the OT laws to our own lives today?

"I would suggest the following theocentric hermeneutical procedure for applying any of the OT laws, whether the law be deemed ceremonial, judicial, or moral:

1. Remind yourself that this law is not my law, that I am not legally bound by it, that it is one of the laws God issued to ancient Israel as part of his covenant with them.
2. Determine the original meaning, significance, and purpose of the law.
3. Determine the theological significance of the law.
4. Determine the practical implications of the theological insights gained from this law for your own NT circumstances."

For similar (though not identical) perspectives, see:

- Thomas Schreiner, *40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law*
- Douglas Moo, "[Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law](#)"
- Douglas Moo, "[The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ](#)"
- Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach*
- Frank Thielman, *The Law and the New Testament: The Question of Continuity*
- D. A. Carson, "[Jesus and the Sabbath in the Four Gospels](#)"
- Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics*

10 Things You Should Know About the Ten Commandments

NOVEMBER 5, 2018 | Kevin DeYoung

Editors' note:

This is an adapted excerpt from *The 10 Commandments: What They Mean, Why They Matter, and Why We Should Obey Them*, published in partnership with Crossway.

1. Moses never actually refers to them as the “ten commandments.”

[Exodus 20:1–2](#) introduces one of the most famous sections in the Bible—indeed, one of the most important pieces of religious literature in the whole world—the Ten Commandments. Oddly enough, they’re never actually called the Ten Commandments.

The Hebrew expression, which occurs three times in the Old Testament ([Ex. 34:28](#); [Deut. 4:13](#); [10:4](#)), literally means “ten words.” This is why [Exodus 20](#) is often referred to as the Decalogue, *deka* being the Greek word for “ten” and *logos* meaning “word.” These are the Ten Words that God gave the Israelites at Mount Sinai—and, I would argue, the Ten Words that God wants all of us to follow.

2. They show us who God is.

The law is an expression of the Lawgiver’s heart and character. We must think about that before we say, “I don’t care for laws,” or before we bristle at the thought of do’s and don’ts. The commandments not only show us what God wants; they show us what God is like. They say something about his honor, his worth, and his majesty. They tell us what matters to God. We can’t disdain the law without disrespecting the Lawgiver.

3. They set us apart from the world.

As Christians, we’re a kingdom of priests and a holy nation ([1 Pet. 2:9](#)). We must be prepared to stand alone, to look different, and to have rules the world doesn’t understand. Of course, we aren’t always the holy people we should be, but that’s what he has called us to be. That’s who we are. We’re God’s people, set apart to live according to God’s ways.

4. They don’t strip our freedom, but instead provide it.

We too often think of the Ten Commandments as constraining us—as if God’s ways will keep us in servitude and from realizing our dreams and reaching our potential. We forget that God means to give us abundant life ([John 10:10](#)) and true freedom ([John 8:32](#)). His laws, [1 John 5:3](#) tells us, aren’t burdensome.

God isn’t trying to crush us with red tape and regulations. The Ten Commandments aren’t prison bars, but traffic laws. Maybe there are some anarchists out there who think, *The world would be a better place without any traffic laws*. A few of us drive as if that were so! But even if you get impatient when you’re at a red light, try to zoom through the yellow, and turn left on a stale pink—overall, aren’t you glad that there is some semblance of law and order? People stop and go. People slow down when driving by schools. They stop for school buses. You wouldn’t be able to drive your car to the grocery store without laws. When you drive on a switchback on a mountain pass, do you curse the guard rails that keep you from plunging to an untimely death? No, someone put them there at great expense, and for our good, that we may travel about freely and safely.

The Ten Commandments aren’t instructions on how to get out of Egypt. They are rules for a free people to stay free.

5. They were not given so that we could earn our salvation.

Some people view Christianity as: God has rules, and if I follow the rules, God will love me and save me. That’s not what happened in the story of the exodus. The Israelites were an oppressed people, and God said, “I hear your cry. I will save you because I love you. And when you are saved, free, and forgiven, I’m going to give you a new way to live.”

Salvation isn’t the *reward* for obedience; salvation is the *reason* for obedience. Jesus doesn’t say, “If you obey my commandments, I will love you.” Instead, he first washes the feet of the disciples and then says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” ([John 14:15](#)). All of our doing is only because of what he has first done for us.

6. They are more trustworthy than our intuition or cultural code.

We live in a paradoxical age where many will say, “Right and wrong is what you decide for yourself,” and yet these same people will rebuke others for violating any number of assumed commands. As a culture, we may be quite free and liberal when it comes to sex, but we can be absolutely fundamentalist when it comes to the moral claims of the sexual revolution. The old swear words may not scandalize us any longer, but now there are other words—offensive slurs and insults—that will quickly put someone out of polite company. We’re still a society with a moral code.

But the Bible says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom ([Prov. 9:10](#)). The way to find moral instruction isn’t by listening to your gut but by listening to God. If we want to know right from wrong, if we want to know how to live the good life, if we want to know how to live in a way that blesses our friends and neighbors, we’d be wise to do things God’s way, which means paying careful attention to the Ten Commandments.

7. The church’s most important instruction has been based on them.

The church has historically put the Ten Commandments at the center of its teaching ministry, especially for children and new believers. For centuries, catechetical instruction was based on three things: the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Ten Commandments.

In other words, when people asked, “How do we do discipleship? How do we teach our kids about the Bible? What do new Christians need to know about Christianity?” their answers always included an emphasis on the Ten Commandments.

8. They are critical to our understanding of the rest of the Old Testament law.

While it’s true that the Bible doesn’t say to print the Ten Commandments in boldface, we shouldn’t undersell their special stature in ancient Israel. They came from God as he spoke to the people face-to-face ([Deut. 5:1–5](#)), and they came from Mount Sinai amid fire, cloud, thick darkness, and a loud voice ([Deut. 5:22–27](#)). [Exodus 20](#) marks a literal and spiritual high point in the life of Israel. It’s no wonder the tablets of the law, along with the manna and Aaron’s staff, were placed inside the ark of the covenant ([Heb. 9:4](#)).

There are many more laws in the Old Testament. But these first ten are foundational for the rest. The Ten Commandments are like the constitution for Israel, and what follows are the regulatory statutes.

9. They are central to the ethics of the New Testament.

Think of [Mark 10:17](#), for example. This is where the rich young ruler comes to Jesus and asks, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus says to him, “You know the commandments.” Then he lists the second table of the law, the commandments that relate to our neighbors: “Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother” (v. 19).

Jesus isn’t laying out a path for earning eternal life. We know from the rest of the story that Jesus is setting the young man up for a fall, because the one command he obviously hasn’t obeyed is the one command Jesus skips—do not covet (vv. 20–22). But it is noteworthy that when Jesus has to give a convenient summary of our neighborly duties, he goes straight to the Ten Commandments.

10. They are still relevant for Christians today.

Can we keep the commandments fully or perfectly? No. Do they serve to show us our sin and lead us to the cross? Absolutely. But the commandments also show us the way to live, the way to love our neighbor, and the way to love God with all our heart and soul.

We still need the Ten Words handed down at Sinai. Have they been changed in some respects by the coming of Christ? For sure—transformed but not trashed. We can no longer keep the Ten Commandments rightly unless we keep them in Christ, through Christ, and with a view to the all-surpassing greatness of Christ. As new creations in Christ, the law is not only our duty but also our delight. If we want to love Christ as he deserves and as he desires, we will keep his commandments ([John 14:15](#)).

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