

## **The Christian and the Law**

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### **Three Views on the Law**

1.) Theonomy: This view seeks to reinstitute Old Testament law as civil law or government. These people are sometimes called reconstructionists and their views are usually associated with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church or facets of it. Though this view is held by many respected thinkers, it is very difficult to sustain this view with any consistency and one must hold to a radical form of covenant theology to sustain any positive arguments.

2.) Three-tier view of the law: People who hold this view can range from Reformed Baptists to Dispensationalists to your average evangelical Christian. This view sees the law as divided into three parts: Civil, Ceremonial, and Moral law. The civil and ceremonial aspects of the law are fulfilled in Christ, but the moral aspect remains in force for us today. Thus, we are to obey the Ten Commandments, and for some, such as Reformed Baptists, this means serious observance of the Christian Sabbath—Sunday. Most in this camp would argue that we only obey those aspects of the law that are clearly repeated in the NT (e.g., 9 of the 10 commandments, minus the Sabbath command). Moreover, many in this camp view the moral law possessing a three-fold use:

- a.) The law reproveth and corrects the unbeliever morally.
- b.) The law leads us to Christ in the sense that it shows us our sinfulness.
- c.) The law now is used to guide Christians in sanctification (i.e., Martin Luther's third use of the law).

However, there are several questions that must be asked of this view. First, does the NT distinguish a three-tier view of the law (civil, ceremonial, and moral)? Second, if the law was to be taken as a whole, why then do I obey only nine of the ten commandments? Third, is the law meant to lead us to Christ in the sense that we preach it and from it see our sin? Finally, does the NT teach that the law is our guide for Christian sanctification?

3.) Modified-Lutheran view or Redemptive-Historical view of the law (i.e., New Covenant Theology): This view argues that Christ is the fulfillment of the entire law (civil, ceremonial, and moral) as well as the entire OT as testified by the NT writers (Luke 24:27; 44; Acts 13:15; Rom 3:21). How is Christ the fulfillment of the law?

- a.) The law was read as a testimony to the coming of Christ, just like the entire OT (this was known in various ways: sacrificial system, the rituals, the laws, the decalogue, etc.).
- b.) The law was only a custodian, guardian, or babysitter until Christ came (Gal 3:15ff; 3 stages: before law, during law, after law). Christ is now our lawgiver.

In other words, the law always pointed to Christ, not simply in terms of our need for permanent atonement, but its laws, rituals, and institutions all pointed to Jesus (e.g., Sabbath rest). (Moreover, most people only view the OT pointing to and fulfilled in Christ in those texts that speak of his atoning work on the cross, but all of Scripture points to him; e.g., Psa 40:6-8; Heb 10:5-7; Isa 8:17-18; Heb 2:13).

Since Christ has come and fulfilled the law (Matt 5:17-20), our law is not the Mosaic law (in its entirety), but the royal law—the law of Christ (James 1:25; 2:8, 12). Thus, I am not under the law nor am I lawless, but in-lawed to Christ (John 13:34; Rom 6:14-15; 7:1ff; 10:4; 1 Cor 9:21; Gal 5:18; 6:21 Rom 13:9-10; Col 2:17; cf., Isa 2:3; 42:4; 51:1ff; Micah 4:2). What is the law of Christ? It is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves (love defined by truth, Matt 22:37-39; Mark 12:33; fruit of the Spirit, Gal 5:14-26). In other words, I do not follow the 10 commandments, but I see them as Christ fulfills them. For instance, the OT law could only judge a person externally, and never internally. In other words, a person could be perfectly obedient to the law but be unregenerate. Jesus has proclaimed that with his coming he has fulfilled everything the law pointed to and, in doing so, has instituted a new law, which takes into consideration the heart (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount; Matt 5:21-48; much higher demand than external conformity; also see Jesus' confrontation with the religious leaders—love and mercy is what matters, Matt 23:1ff). Jesus did not give the true meaning of the law, or a deeper meaning of the law, nor did he simply fulfill the law with his obedience (active obedience), but he has given a new law (the Mosaic Law could never save).

Does this new law contradict God's word in the OT? No, rather the Mosaic Law spoke to Christ and God's revelation now comes, not through the old covenant, but the new covenant inaugurated by the Son (Mark 1:14; Gal 4:1ff; John 1:17). Love and mercy (Lev 19:18) was commanded in the OT, but never able to be kept by a theocratic nation because of unregenerate hearts; thus, they needed perpetual sacrifice, but now with a new heart the law can be kept, because God has changed our hearts and given us his Spirit (c.f., Heb 8:7-13; Rom 8:4). God has remained the same, but the expression of his nature and character are not revealed through tablets of stone, but through his Son, by the Spirit (2 Cor 3:3; 2 Cor 5:17). Jesus is our permanent high priest. With the changing of the priesthood comes a changing of the law (Heb 7:1ff). This new law is the law of Christ. Thus, we are to listen to Jesus and look to him as our law-giver (Mark 9:7; cf., Deut 18:15-22). Now the law is still present in our Bibles; thus, how do we look at the law? Jesus stated that he came to fulfill the law, but that we are not to annul any of the law (Matt 5:17-20). I do not annul the law, but now I understand it, read it, and teach it as it finds its fulfillment in Christ; thus, I understand the Mosaic Law as Jesus and the apostles did.

In the book of Acts (2:36, 7:51-53, 13:38-41, 15:7-11, 17:30-31; cf. Matt 19:16-24) you never see the apostles preach the law in order to make people feel sorry for their sin. Rather, you see them preach Christ as the fulfillment of the law and prophets. Moreover, the law is never viewed in the NT as three separate parts; rather it is viewed as a whole. It would be an offense to the Jew in the first-century to divide the law. The three-fold distinction of the law is a man-made concept created to address the law and the Christian, because there has been a failure to view the law and the Christian from a redemptive-historical position. Finally, the law is not the standard by which we grow in sanctification, rather our standard is Christ as we look to him and imitate

him (Heb 12:1ff). He is our example. How do I teach from the law, I teach it as it finds its fulfillment in Jesus.