

The Christian and the Law

Though *law* is used in various ways in the Bible, The New Testament often uses the term for *the Law delivered through Moses*. It is important to understand how Christians should relate to the demands of the Mosaic Law. We will look at the nature and purpose of that Law and how it affects Christians.

The nature of the Mosaic Law

The Law was given specifically to Israel. God gave the Law through Moses as a covenant with a particular people (Israel), for a particular time (until Jesus Christ), for a particular purpose. That purpose was to constitute and govern the nation in its civil, religious, and moral responsibilities until the Messiah, Jesus, came to redeem mankind and establish His kingdom (Gal. 3:19-25). It was also intended to expose the sinfulness of man and the futility of establishing their own righteousness before God (Rom. 3:20).

The Law was an indivisible unit. Though the Law contained moral, civil, and ceremonial regulations, it has always been considered an undividable unit (Gal. 5:3; James 2:10). It was given as a unit, sealed as one covenant, and Israel was held responsible to it as a unit.

The Law was temporary. God's moral principles existed before the Law and continue after the period of Law. The Law encoded those principles for Israel for a specific time until the Messiah, Jesus, would fulfill it (Matt. 5:17-18).

Jesus' relationship to the Mosaic Law

Jesus kept the Law. Unlike sinful man and disobedient Israel, Jesus was able to keep all the demands of the Law. He lived under the Mosaic Covenant observing its rules and rituals (Matt. 5:17; Gal. 4:4-5).

Jesus fulfilled the Law. Because Jesus kept the law perfectly, He was able to say that He fulfilled its demands on behalf of all people. He did not come to destroy it, but to terminate it and set it aside since He was the fulfillment of its purpose (Matt. 5:17-18). God's moral principles were in force for Israel throughout His life, which principles remained after His life, though not encoded in the Mosaic form. But Jesus is the end of the Law, because He fulfills its intended goal, especially for those who believe in Him (Rom. 10:4; Eph. 2:14-15; Col. 2:13-14).

Jesus rendered the Law obsolete. Jesus inaugurated a New Covenant making the Old Covenant of the Law obsolete (Matt. 26:28; Heb. 8:13). No longer are priests and sacrifices necessary because Jesus became our final High Priest and our final eternal sacrifice (Heb. 7:20-28; 10:11-14).

The Christian's relationship to the Mosaic Law

The Christian is not under the Law, but under grace. This is clearly affirmed by many verses (Rom. 6:14; 7:4-6; 10:4; Gal. 2:19). It is not enough to say the Christian is not under only the civil and ceremonial aspects of the Law, because the Law is a unit. However, the moral principles of the Law are timeless and ultimately repeated in the New Testament. For example, it was wrong to murder before the Law, under the Law, and now also under grace. Though no longer under the Law, that apostle Paul voluntarily submitted to it on occasion in order to win those under the Law, the Jews (Acts 16:1-3; 1 Cor. 9:19-23).

The Christian should respect the Law as holy and good. Since the Law was given by God and reflects His righteous and holy character, the Law itself was holy. It was also good, because it gave Israel moral guidance and restrained evildoers (Rom. 7:12; 1 Tim. 1:8). While not under the Law as a code, Christians today can learn from the timeless principles taught by the Law.

The Christian can apply the principles of the Law. For example, the Law demanded that Israelites give a certain percentage of their produce and flocks to the Lord (Lev. 27:30-32; Deut. 14:22-24; 26:12-13). But giving a percentage to the Lord was evidently practiced before the Law (Gen. 4:3-4; 14:18-20). The principle of giving is repeated in the New Testament with the difference that giving is no longer under the compulsion of Law, but is

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voluntary under grace and motivated by gratitude for God’s blessings (2 Cor. 9:7-15). The principle remains, but the application varies.

The Christian is under the Law of Christ. Jesus left Christians with His “new commandment” to love one another (John 13:34). When Christians love one another, they fulfill the intended requirements of the Mosaic Law (Rom. 13:10; Gal. 5:13-14). In Galatians 6:2, the apostle Paul makes it clear that “the law of Christ” is the principle of caringly loving one another (cf. 1 Cor. 9:21; also the “royal law” of James 2:8). The Law of Christ begins with love, but also includes all that love encompasses. Those led by the Spirit under the Law of Christ are not under the Law of Moses (Rom. 8:2-4; Gal. 5:18). In the Church Age, grace does not evade the Law but replaces and exceeds it.

The Christian has a higher motivation under grace. Simply put, under the Law, people were blessed because they obeyed; under grace, people obey because they are blessed. This is a higher intrinsic motivation that far exceeds the morality sought by the Law because it realizes the love of God who gave His Son to save us when we did not deserve it. Therefore, “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Love motivates our obedience to His New Testament commands (John 14:21).

This chart shows the difference between the Law of Moses and the grace of Jesus Christ:

LAW	GRACE	SCRIPTURE
God’s rule for the nation of Israel	God’s rule for the church	Rom. 2:14; 6:14; 7:6; 9:4
Came by Moses	Came by Jesus Christ	John 1:17; 2 Cor. 3:7-14
Written in stone	Written on the heart	Rom. 2:28; 2 Cor. 3:3
Exposes sin	Expiates sin	Rom. 3:20-26; 5:13; 6:23; 7:7; Eph 1:7
Curses	Blesses	Gal. 3:10, 14, 22; 4:1-7
Brings death and condemnation	Brings life and righteousness	Rom. 3:19; 5:18; 7:10; 2 Cor. 3:6
Cannot justify before God	Justifies before God	Rom. 3:20-24; 10:3-4; Gal. 2:16-21
Demands holiness	Gives holiness	Rom. 7:12; 8:3-4; Titus 2:11-12
What man must do for God	What Christ has done for men	Rom. 5:17-21; 10:5; Heb. 10:1-14
Cannot bring spiritual maturity	Brings spiritual maturity	Rom. 7:22-8:4; Gal. 3:2-3; Heb. 10:14
Leads to faith	Lives by faith	Gal. 2:19-20; 3:12, 24; Phil. 3:9
Gives what is deserved	Gives what is not deserved	Rom. 2:5-16; 11:6; Eph. 2:8-9
Enslaves to sin	Frees from sin	Rom. 8:2-3, 15; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 4:1-7
Judges according to one’s works	Judges according to Christ’s work	Rom. 2:5-16; Col. 2:13-14; Heb. 10:10
Do good in order to be blessed	Do good because you are blessed	Rom. 10:5; 12:1-3; Gal. 3:12-14

Conclusion

God’s commandments in any form communicate His moral principles. However, through the various periods of time, God has encoded his morality in different forms. For Israel, God’s principles of morality were coded through the Mosaic Covenant. For Christians, they are expressed in the Law of Christ. We are always expected to follow God’s moral principles and commands, but only under the code specified for His people at any particular time. In the Church Age, the Christian is under Christ’s new commandment of love motivated to obedience by God’s love and grace, which far exceeds the more external emphasis in the demands of the Mosaic Law for Israel. Rather than being motivated by the Law’s rules and consequences, the Christian is motivated by grace and the resultant relationship it brings with God.