

The Law of God

Deuteronomy 32:47 (ESV)

CONTEXT: As you are reading through the Old Testament you should start to see some familiar trends.

For example notice how the life of Jesus and the history of Israel coincide.

- Israel fleeing to Egypt for safety from the famine - Jesus fled to Egypt for safety from Herod.
- Israel passed through the Red Sea which Hebrews called their baptism - Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River.
- Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, Jesus was tempted in the wilderness 40 days.
- Israel organized into 12 tribes, Jesus called the 12 Disciples.
- Now, Moses ascends on mount Sinai to receive the Law of God - The Gospels tell us that Jesus went up and sat on a Mountain and explained the Law of God in the Sermon on the Mount.

The Law of God is radically important for you as a Christian - There are **220 references** to the Law of Moses in the New Testament that's almost as many as there are in the OT. It's practically impossible to understand the NT unless you have some grasp of the Law.

Missionally - the Law is said to be written on heart of every person you come in contact with. The law is the Evangelist's best friend. Last week when Mark Witt preached - I hope you recognized how frequently he mentioned the 10 commandments. Why? That is the birthplace of conviction.

The Old Testament Law is something that has been a source of bewilderment for Christians for many years.

1. It's so deeply rooted in the Jewish culture and many of us Gentiles find it strange.
2. We tend to see it as antithetical to grace so we tend to act as if there is no law at all.
3. Let's face it - it's just really hard.

INTRODUCTION: Several years ago author **A.J. Jacobs** wrote a book called, "**A year of Living Biblically**". It's NOT a Christian book... as a matter of fact the author describes himself as agnostic. Ethnically, he is Jewish but he says, "**I'm officially Jewish, but I'm Jewish in the same way that Olive Garden is officially an Italian restaurant.**"

So, here is what he's going to do - he reads the entire old testament and writes down all 613 commands and tries to live according to the law and journals his experience. As you can imagine, the outcome is pretty entertaining... for example,

- Leviticus says that men should leave the edges of their beards unshaven, so this guy stops shaving and ends up with a massive beard that makes him look like a member of ZZ Top.
- He stops wearing clothes made of any mixed fibers
- He learns to play a ten string harp
- He refuses to shake hands with women who might be ceremonially unclean; (that had to be awkward, right?—I mean, how do you tell? Your skirt is a little too short... I bet you're unclean...)

- And (this was one of my favorites), he tries to fling tiny pebbles at people without them noticing in order to stone adulterers.

This whole process almost drove his poor wife crazy for a year... But the book reveals, I think, how most people feel about the Commandments... **they're out of date; backwards; restrictive...**

But we see all throughout the Old Testament that they took great joy in the Law.

Deuteronomy 32:47 (ESV)

⁴⁷ For it (that is the Law) is no empty word for you, but your very life...

So none of the law is accidental or incidental - but fundamental to our understanding of Christ and the Gospel.

Jesus said the entire law can be summed up in two commands:

1. Love the Lord your God with all your heart soul mind and strength.
2. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Those two primary commands are unpacked in the 10 commandments.

1. First Four are Horizontal (God-ward) - How to Love God with all your heart.
2. The Last Six are Vertical (Man-ward) - How to Love your Neighbor as yourself.

The total 613 commands found in Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Numbers are a detailed exposition of the 10 commandments.

The Law was to serve us in Three ways -

1. A Picture of God's Nature
2. A Guide for Man's Nurture
3. A Revelation of Man's Need

Let's walk through each of those -

1. A Picture of God's Nature -

The Law is always a reflection of the Lawgiver.

Leviticus 11:44–45 (ESV)

⁴⁴ For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, **and be holy, for I am holy.**

Jesus said, "if you love ME keep MY commandments". John 14:15

Why? Because nothing communicates **WHO** God is better than **WHAT** He has commanded.

The law tells us what God values and what He despises. It's the same way with us...

EXAMPLE: We have laws in our home - this morning my son was cooking eggs with a new skillet that Julie got for Christmas - it's one of those copper indestructible kind. Cole was using a

stainless steel spatula on it and the wrath of mama was revealed from heaven against that sinner... why? Momma values that skillet. Her law reveals what she values.

So when God says...

- *You shall not murder - God loves and values human life.*
- *You shall not commit adultery - God is faithful.*
- *You shall not steal - God is your provider.*
- *You shall not bear false witness - God is true and just.*
- *You shall not covet - God is a loving shepherd providing you with what He wants you to have.*

Righteous

- * *God—“The LORD is righteous in all His ways” (Psalms 145:17).*
- * *Law—“All Your commandments are righteousness” (Psalms 119:172).*

Truth

- * *God—“You have redeemed me, O LORD, God of truth” (Psalms 31:5).*
- * *Law—“Your law is truth” (Psalms 119:142).*
- *

Goodness

- * *God—“Good and upright is the LORD” (Psalms 25:8).*
- * *Law—“The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12).*

Love

- * *God—“God is love” (1 John 4:8).*
- * *Law—“Love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13: 10).*

When we look in the Law we see the heart of God and how far short we fall from it.

*But not only does the Law serve as a **Picture of God’s Nature**, but secondly...*

2. A Guide for Man’s Nurture

Deuteronomy 4:40 (ESV)

⁴⁰ Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, **that it may go well with you** and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for all time.”

ILLUSTRATION: The Law of God gives us freedom to the Christian the way **water gives freedom to a fish**. You may see a fish and feel sorry for it, it is in bondage to water.. you take the fish out and through him into a field and say, “be free!” but the field doesn’t offer him freedom because he wasn’t built for the field - it brings him death.

A Train is MOST powerful when it is on the tracks. If it rejects the tracks and jumps off the tracks, it’s not long before it’s stalled, useless - why? It was designed for the track.

We live in a day where FREEDOM is equated with NO RESTRAINT.

If a boy doesn’t want to be a boy - he just “self identifies” as a girl. ‘And the rest of us are supposed to make believe along with him. But stats prove that we’ve thrown the fish into the field. The suicide rate among transgenders is upward of 40% by reliable estimates.

Sometimes people ask: Well which laws are we supposed to obey? Well the Law can be divided into three categories: Civil, Ceremonial, and Moral Laws.

- a. **Civil Laws** - These were simply laws that ensured the flourishing of community. Many of these are common for many societies both ancient and modern. So they do things like uphold the ownership of private property. They ensure justice and equity for the poor as well as the rich. They provided a system of Justice when crimes were committed.

Now these laws no longer apply because the Church doesn't live in a Theocracy as one Ethnic People as Israel did. We live as people from every tribe and tongue in practically every form of government imaginable.... republics, democracies, dictatorships, communism, you name it. In the New Testament we are told to submit to the authorities God establishes over us, to render to Caesar that which is Caesar's.

1 Peter 2:13–15 (ESV)

¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

Thankfully, we live in a land where our founding documents echo much of values that the civil law God gave to Israel.

Not only are their Civil laws...

- b. **Ceremonial Laws** - These were ceremonies the Nation of Israel were to keep which prefigured and explained the Person and Work of the Messiah who was to come.

Sacrificial Ordinances were ceremonial laws. The sacrifice of animals DID NOT ultimately atone for their sins - but it pointed to the Lamb of God, Jesus who WOULD Atone for their sins.

In the New Testament, God has replaced those ceremonial laws, but we still have ceremonies - Baptism... when you place your faith in Christ you are to keep a ceremony and be immersed in water to show the world that you are trusting in the Death, Burial and Resurrection of Christ. The Lord's Supper - points back to the body and blood of Christ as payment for our sins.

- c. **Moral Laws** -

These are commandments that give us a window into the heart of God; they show us His face. Now, Christ has freed us from the law, but the God they reveal hasn't changed... the things that were offensive to Him and harmful to us are still offensive to Him and harmful to us. So, these laws are still applicable.

- *For example, God still loves purity. He still loves honesty. He still knows how He designed sex to work.*

OUR STATUS UNDER THE LAW HAS CHANGED, BUT THE GOD WHO GAVE THE LAWS HAS NOT.

You say, Well certain points of the Law offend me: Of course they do, because God is not like you...What is fascinating is observing how the Bible offends different cultures in different ways. As an American, we get offended by what God says about sexual purity. Other cultures aren't offended by that at all... but the stuff about loving your enemies and God becoming man... that offends them.

The Law serve as a Picture of God's Nature, a Guide for Man's Nurture...and thirdly..

3. A Revelation of Man's Need

Galatians 3:23–26 (ESV)

²³ Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

The LAW serves as a teacher that shows and explains to us our need for Christ.

You think you should go to heaven based on your works? Read the law, not just the letter of the law - but read the sermon on the Mount and get it's intent.

But while the law can show us our sin - it can't remove our sin.
It can curb our expression of sin through fear of penalty but it can't change our heart.

The Law of God as great as it is, is not enough.

That is why Jesus came. He was a bewildering figure to the Legal Hierarchy of His day. Because it looks at times like Jesus is breaking the law.

- He heals on the Sabbath.
- He touches the leper.
- He is touched by a woman with an issue of blood.
- He touches a little girl who is dead.
- He accepts and embraces the adulterer who by law was to be stoned.

Then he says something remarkable - **Matthew 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

That phrase fulfill is interesting in the Greek - it doesn't mean, "KEEP" but rather to make up what is lacking. In other words I came to do what the law couldn't.

EXAMPLE: Numbers 5:1–3 (ESV)

¹ The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Command the people of Israel that they put out of the camp everyone who is **leprous** or has a **discharge** and everyone who is unclean through contact with the **dead**. ³ You shall put out both male and female, putting them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camp, in the midst of which I dwell."

- **LEPER** - So the law says if you have a spot of leprosy you are to be quarantined and ultimately exiled outside the camp. If you even saw a human you were cry out, "unclean"

Matthew 8:1–3 (ESV)

¹ When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. ² And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." ³ And **Jesus stretched out his hand** and touched him, saying, "**I will; be clean.**" And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

JESUS DID WHAT THE LAW COULD NOT!

- **DISCHARGE** - Luke 8:42–48 (ESV) ⁴² As Jesus went, the people pressed around him. ⁴³ And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased. ⁴⁵ And Jesus said, "**Who was it that touched me?**" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!" ⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "**Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me.**" ⁴⁷ And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. ⁴⁸ And he said to her, Why did you touch me, now I'm ceremonially unclean? NO!

"**Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.**"

- **CONTACT WITH THE DEAD** - Luke 8:49–55 (ESV) ⁴⁹ While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more." ⁵⁰ But Jesus on hearing this answered him, "**Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well.**" ⁵¹ And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child. ⁵² And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, "**Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping.**" ⁵³ And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. ⁵⁴ But taking her by the hand he called, saying, "**Child, arise.**" ⁵⁵ And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat.

THE LAW SAYS - You are a sinner and the just penalty for your sin is eternity in Hell. And friend you can try to keep the law, but you will find yourself broke, busted and disgusted - it will leave you wrecked. But thanks be unto God, Jesus can do what the Law cannot - he can not only forgive your sin, he can impose His righteous glory into your life.

Romans 8:3 (ESV)

³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,

We LOVE the law, but we LEAN on the Savior.