

means that in practice there are “laws” (commands) that guide our practice and if we disregard them, we are outside of God’s will and committing sin (John 15:10). God has commanded us to love our neighbors and if we don’t, we have sinned. In order to avoid confusion, it is best to not classify this as “under the law” (cf. 1 Cor 9:20-21) but rather speak of living “according to the Spirit” who has revealed his will through the Scriptures he inspired (Rom 8:5; Gal 5:18).

SIMILAR CONCLUSIONS, DIFFERENT MEANS

“I am not, then, suggesting that the essential ‘moral’ *content* of the Mosaic law is not applicable to believers. On the ‘bottom line’ question of what Christians are actually to *do*, I could well find myself in complete agreement with, say, a colleague who takes a traditional Reformed approach to the Mosaic law. The difference would lie not in what Christians are to do but in how it is to be discovered. While my Reformed colleague might argue that we are bound to whatever in the Mosaic law has not been clearly overturned by New Testament teaching, I argue that we are bound only to that which is clearly repeated within New Testament teaching” (Douglas Moo, *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 376).

In my opinion, right means are more important than right conclusions. (Interpretation is like math in this way.)

GOING FURTHER

Study and explain three crucial passages: Matthew 5:17-20, Romans 9:30–10:4, and 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

What is the “law of Christ” (see Galatians 6:2; James 1:25-2:12)?

PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Read Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36, and Hebrews 8–10. Try to determine what the New Covenant is and then identify if it is in operation today. If you think it is, explain how it is. If not, explain how/when it will be fulfilled and how it relates to the church.

BELIEVERS AND THE LAW

PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Think about whether Christians are under the law (and if so, what law). Important passages include Matt 5:17–20, Rom 6–8, 9:30–10:4; Gal 2:15–21; 3:10–29; James 2:8.

INTRODUCTION

Are believers under the law today? This is a tricky question because there are multiple uses of the word law and there are differing Christian views. Some verses say that Christians are not under the law, but others suggest that they are. This study is an attempt to come to clear conclusions on how the believer is and is not under the law.

THE USE OF THE WORD “LAW” IN THE BIBLE

Some confusion results from the various ways in which the word “law” is used in the Bible. Often it is used as a synonym for the legal requirements set forth in the Mosaic Covenant (Exod 19–Deut 34; Rom 9:4). But it can also be used as a synonym for the Pentateuch as a whole (Matt 5:18; Luke 24:44) or even all of the Old Testament (1 Cor 14:21). The word is sometimes used to refer to a general command of God outside the Pentateuch (Rom 8:7; Gal 6:2). A fourth use of the word is as a synonym for “principle” (Rom 3:27; 8:2).

ETERNAL LAW CONTRASTED WITH PARTICULAR LAW

By virtue of God’s existence, there is a divine will. When God created man, he began to express that will through commands which might be termed “law.” Sometimes the commands were binding upon all creation throughout time and sometimes they were specifically limited to a particular person, people, or situation. God commanded Noah not to murder because man is created in the image of God (Gen 9:5-6). The basis for the command makes it clear that this is a timeless decree (since all people are made in God’s image). But when God told Abram to leave his country, this was a particular expression of God’s will not intended for all people.

There may well be truth about God's character and purposes from his command ("law") to Abram, but the command itself is not binding upon those to whom it was not given.

AN EXAMPLE OF PARTICULAR LAW: THE MOSAIC COVENANT

Similarly, when God made a covenant with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, he revealed his will in an extensive body of literature that contains many laws. These laws were not given to other nations and other nations were not accountable to keep them. Today we live outside the Mosaic Covenant (see below for reasons why). Thus these laws are not binding upon us. Yet we can learn about God's character, purposes, and will through the Mosaic Law.

ARE BELIEVERS UNDER THE MOSAIC LAW?

The issue may be crystallized this way: Are believers to keep the Ten Commandments? The answer is both yes and no. No, by virtue of the fact that the Ten Commandments are in an obsolete covenant made with another people. But yes (mostly), by virtue of the fact that nine of the commandments are stated to be in effect in the New Testament (outside the bounds of the Mosaic Covenant context). The sole omission, the Sabbath law, thus serves as a good test case for one's view of the Law. Those who believe that the Mosaic Law is binding on the church (either out of ignorance or the mistaken notion that Israel=the church) insist on Sabbath observance. Those who reckon the Sabbath command as integral to the Mosaic Covenant do not consider it obligatory because of the obsolescence of that covenant. This, of course, was the view of Paul, who wrote, "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom 14:5). If a person has the freedom to not keep the Sabbath, then Sabbath observance is not binding.

In short, the Mosaic Covenant was a particular expression of God's will to a certain people at a certain time. It was not a timeless covenant but one that was temporary, intended to accomplish certain purposes. Its temporary nature was recognized by Moses within the covenant itself: Moses predicted that Israel would

abandon the covenant and be scattered among the nations (Deut 29). But the hope of a new covenant is also given, for Moses predicted that God would bring the people back and circumcise their hearts (Deut 30). Jeremiah develops this idea, noting that the new covenant will not be like the old (Mosaic) covenant which they broke but will be an eternal one (Jer 31:31-34). Thus it is already clear in the Old Testament that the Mosaic Covenant was limited in duration and served a greater purpose.

HOW IS THE MOSAIC LAW RELEVANT TODAY?

While the Mosaic Law expresses some of the timeless moral will of God, it also includes specific commands not binding outside of that covenant. To determine a command's relevance for today we must consider (1) the basis for the law (e.g., the Sabbath was a sign of the Mosaic Covenant; Exod 31:17), (2) other biblical revelation (e.g., murder was forbidden to Noah outside the Mosaic Covenant; Gen 9:5-6), and (3) later revelation which clarified its applicability (e.g., Jesus declared all foods clean; Mark 7:19). Though sacrifice for sin was found outside the Mosaic Covenant (earlier than Moses in the time of the patriarchs), the need for it has ceased because of Jesus' all-sufficient death (as explained in Hebrews 9-10).

DOES "NOT UNDER LAW" = LAWLESS?

The believer today is not "under law" in several senses. First, he is not party to the Mosaic Covenant. Second, he is not under law in the sense of condemnation for his sin. The believer has died to the law and thus is no longer subject to it (Rom 7:1-6; Gal 2:19). Whereas the purpose of the law was to reveal sin and lead to Christ (Gal 3:24; 1 Tim 1:9), the believer has no need of the law because the purpose has been accomplished. Third, the believer is not under law in the sense that he must keep the law in order to earn salvation. By virtue of being a believer, he understands that he has been declared righteous on the basis of another person's legal obedience and not his own (Rom 3:20-22; Gal 3:10-13; Phil 3:9).

Yet those who charge us as "antinomian" (apart from law) are wrong in that we insist on submission to God and his revealed will. That