

## Law of Moses & Sermon on the Mount: What Law Do Christians Obey?

By Steve Ray

Dear Jerry:

You mentioned on several occasions, or your questions implied, that you believe the Law (specifically the Ten Commandments) is no longer to Christians under grace. Now that mercy and grace have come through our Lord Jesus Christ the moral precepts of the Mosaic Law are done away with. You brought the topic up in our discussion of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. You specifically pinpointed the Sabbath.

You implied that since the Saturday Sabbath was no longer binding (which you are correct, it is not), it meant the *Law* was no longer binding. Thus the Catholics should not expect—or think that Jesus expects—they to obey the Law and take the commands of God seriously. Protestants often think that Catholics are “saved by works”, or rather, as a result of obeying the Ten Commandments and not a result of relying on grace alone. Obey the commands and go to heaven, disobey the commands and go to hell. “Those Catholics think they can earn their way to heaven.” This is a false caricaturization of the Catholic position.

I was reading the Sermon on the Mount today in Matthew and came across this passage,

Matthew 5:17-20

*17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.*

*18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*

*19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

*20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. (KJV)*

Jesus seems to exhort the disciples to obey the law, not as a means of salvation, because we all know salvation is by grace alone (Eph. 2:8), because the moral Law of the Old Testament, embodied in the Ten Commandments, is not only still to be obeyed, but it has been *intensified*. The patriarchs could simply obey the Law outwardly, the letter of the Law. The new covenant in Christ Jesus does not abolish the Law, it internalizes it, making the Law of God of a deeper and more profound consequence.

The Ten Commandments, as revealed in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, are not abolished or made irrelevant by the work of Christ. The new catechism says, “*According to Christian tradition, the Law is holy, spiritual, and good (Rom 7:12, 14, 16), yet still imperfect. Like a tutor (Gal. 2:24) it shows what must be done, but does not of itself give*

*the strength, the grace of the Spirit, to fulfill it. Because of sin, which it cannot remove, it remains a law of bondage” (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, from now on referred to as CCC, paragraph 1963. The following paragraph is excellent as well). The Law cannot save, it leads us to Christ. It is a tutor to show us our utter need of a Savior.*

Jesus tells us, in the verses quoted earlier from the Sermon on the Mount, that He did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it, even to reveal it further and fulfill it. Here we have the Greek article *ton* which is referring not to “law in general”, but to *the Law*. The Catechism says further, “*The New Law or the Law of the Gospel is the perfection here on earth of the divine law, natural and revealed. It is the Work of Christ and is expressed particularly in the Sermon on the Mount. It is also the work of the Holy Spirit and through him it becomes the interior law of charity: >I will establish a New Covenant with the house of Israel . . . I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts . . .*” (CCC 1965; Scripture quote from Heb 8:8, 10; cf. Jer 31:31-34). It is no longer engraved on stone, it is now engraved in our hearts by the Spirit of God.

I would recommend reading the next few pages of the Catechism which explains clearly how the Law is just an outward demand with no strength to obey, but how, through Christ, it has been fulfilled and applied to us all. How else can one understand the Sermon on the Mount? The Sermon on the Mount was always an enigma to me, but now it makes perfect sense.

Let’s look at each of the laws contained in the Ten Commandments individually. Do we find them each obsolete in the NT? Let’s look at each one of the Ten Commandments and see what the NT does with them. Does Jesus tell us they are no longer binding on us now that we’re no longer under the Mosaic Law, but under grace? By no means. Otherwise what does the Sermon on the Mount mean? He is requiring a very high standard of His followers actually more than the Mosaic Law required.

Now let’s look at the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments of Moses. Did Jesus nullify the first commandment? Are we released from the obligation to “*love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind*”? Absolutely not, for Jesus and the rest of the NT strongly emphasize this point (Mt 22:37; Mk 12:30; Lk 10:27; Gal 5:13,14).

Can we use God’s **Name in vain** now that Christ has died for us? Of course not, we are to remember that “holy is His Name”. We are not allowed to swear an oath in His name or on anything else.

Next comes the **Sabbath** and the command to keep it holy. We will discuss the Sabbath in a moment.

How about the command to **honor your father and mother**? Are we out from under this obligation? No, Paul says children are to obey their parents and ties it back to the Ten Commandments by commenting on it’s being the only command with a promise (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20). Jesus also strongly condemns human tradition that negates a son’s obligation to care for his parents as they grow old (Mark 7:10-13).

What about “**Thou shalt not kill**”? Is it still binding? Not only in it binding, but according to the Lord Jesus, it is not *just* to be kept outwardly, *but inwardly!* We are not only to love our friends, but our neighbors and *even* our enemies. He says:

*Matthew 5:21-22: Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: 22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. (KJV)*

Does this sound like Jesus no longer considers the Law of any importance? If you are reading this passage in an unbiased manner, doesn't it seem to imply he is not only holding us to the Law, but making it much *more* important and internal than the OT requirements. Not only can you not kill, but you can't even be angry. The spirit of the Law, not just the letter. Why isn't Jesus just telling us that if we just have faith in Him, none of those old laws matter anymore? “Followers, you no longer have to be concerned with these OT matters, they are ancient history, all you have to do is have faith in Me and you will get to heaven no matter what.” Jesus never said anything like this, yet many put these words into His mouth.

What about **committing adultery**? Luther said that after one has become a Christian, by faith alone, he could commit adultery one thousand times a day and still be righteous in God's eyes. Do you believe that? Does Jesus agree with Luther? Jesus does not dismiss the Law, he makes it *more* emphatic in Matthew 5:27,28, when He says,

*27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:  
28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.  
29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.  
30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. (KJV)*

Wow, Jesus was speaking to his followers and disciples, so why is He telling them they will be cast into hell if they don't obey, not only the letter of the Law, but the spirit of the Law? Didn't you once say that you could never belong to a Church where people had to be afraid of going to hell for committing one sin? Jesus was pretty emphatic here. Paul shows the obverse side of the coin when he commands us to love our wives (Eph 5:25). This had never been commanded of husbands in the OT economy.

Now, what about **stealing**? Can one steal or be an habitual thief and still go to heaven? The Law says “Thou shalt not steal.” Does Jesus take it away as a demand upon our lives? Paul says that those who steal will *not* inherit the kingdom of heaven. Is he speaking to heathens? No, in fact he is speaking to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 6:8-10

*8 Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren.*

*9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,*

*10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (KJV)*

Does the preceding verse imply that those who are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb are exempt from these warnings? No, by no means.

Can we **bear false witness** now against our brothers, or anyone else? Are we free of the Law? Read what James says, and remember that Paul condemns lying repeatedly,

James 4:11-12

*11 Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.*

*12 There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another? (KJV)*

Can we now **covet** with impunity? Does the blood of Christ shed on Calvary free us from the obligation to cease coveting? Remember 1 Corinthians 6:10 quoted a few paragraphs back? Can we covet one thousand times a day and still go to heaven? If we asked Jesus, “Can we covet 1,000 times a day and still go to heaven?” What would He say? Are we freed from moral obligations before God? Are our works and actions irrelevant? The New Testament says they are very relevant. We are told in Romans 6 that the “wages of sin is death” and this is speaking to Christians, not to the unbelievers or Jews discussed in chapters 1 - 5 of Romans.

We have noticed in previous letters the warnings of judgements not only on the unsaved but the saved, and not only on the basis of faith, but on the basis of works (Mt 25 (the whole chapter); 16:27; 18:22-35; Jn 5:28,29; Rom 2:5-10; 1 Cor 9:27; 2 Cor 5:8-10; Heb 10:26,27; 2 Pet 2:20,21).

Now this brings us back to the **Sabbath**. If the Sabbath is done away with, does that prove we are released from the whole Law of God? What does the Sabbath represent? In Genesis we are given a clue:

Genesis 2:13

*1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.*

*2 And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.*

*3 And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made. (KJV)*

There are two creations of God: the first being “the heavens and the earth, all that is seen and unseen”. The second creation is His Church, the Body of Christ, both seen (those in heaven) and unseen (those still on earth). These can be understood as works of art, each as a poem, in fact our English word *poem* came from the Greek word *poema*. An artist is known partially by the corpus of his work, so God can be understood by His poems, His works of art.

This Greek word is used only twice in the New Testament, once referring to the physical creation; the second referring to the Church. In fact the whole book of Ephesians is about Christ the body, whereas the book of Colossians is about Christ the head. The first occurrence is:

Romans 1:20

*20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the [things that are made], even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: (KJV)*

The four English words in brackets are actually one Greek work *poema*. This is God’s first work of art, admired by some, ignored by others and misinterpreted by most.

The second time the word *poema* is used is in:

Ephesians 2:10

*10 For we are his [workmanship], created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (KJV)*

Here again the word *workmanship*, in brackets, is the same Greek word *poema*. This is God’s second, and equally admirable, creation. Like the first it is both seen and unseen. It is both a visible unity on earth and an invisible “host” already in heaven.

Before we look at the Sabbath as a particular command of the Law, let’s first ask a question. The moral evils that are forbidden by the Law, are they sinful because the Bible forbids them, or, does the Bible forbid them because they are sinful? What came first, the chicken or the egg? They are obviously sinful in and of themselves and *not* just because they were proscribed in the Bible. What makes them sinful? They are contrary to the nature and character of God. He is a holy God, therefore anything that is contrary to His character and nature is *by definition* opposed to God and therefore sinful or morally evil. So, the Law was not, in and of itself, the final statement, the final moral essence. That final standard of holiness goes back *beyond* the Law to the very nature of God; the Law is only a written and “materialized” communication *of* that character of God, which was further and perfectly revealed in Christ.

In fact if you think about it the Law of Moses only forbid things in a negative way, do not do this, do not do that. Under the law of grace the laws still exist, only they are now expressed in positive terms: Not only are you not to murder, but you are now not even to be angry. Not only are you not to commit adultery, you are now required to love your wife. Old Testament proscriptions, negative. New Testament the flip side of the coin, prescriptions, positive. Jesus repeated the formula several times, “. . . *you have heard that it was said to the men of old . . . but I say to you . . .*”

So, how are these two creations different and how are they the same. We could dissect this for hours but I want to key in on how the word *rest* applies to each. In the first creation God worked six days and then rested. Therefore, the Jewish law reflected the Old Testament economy. One works and *then* rests. The old covenant demands much outward activity and obedience with no grace or strength given to accomplish the task. Remember the CCC “*Like a tutor (Gal. 2:24) it shows what must be done, but does not of itself give the strength, the grace of the Spirit, to fulfill it. Because of sin, which it cannot remove, it remains a law of bondage.*” Therefore, you work for six days and then rest, like God with His first creation.

However, in the new economy of Christ, revealed in the law of grace, it is the other way around. Things change. It is the same coin, for God is the same Creator, but the coin is flipped to the other side. The second creation is the Church. Christ has come not to abolish the Law (with the Greek article) but to fulfill it. The Book of Hebrews (an early Christian homily to a Jewish audience) uses the word *rest* ten times. The key usage is in:

Hebrews 4:8-11

*8 For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.*

*9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.*

*10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.*

*11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. (KJV)*

We have here a rest that is in Christ. How so? We are completely unable to work for our salvation. It can only come by the free grace of God, through faith (Rom 3:28; Gal 2:16). We can never approach God with anything of ourselves and gain His righteousness, it is only by free grace, mercy and the love of God that this can be done. So, we do not work for our salvation (Ephesians 2:8). We receive it as a free gift from God. We start the week with *our rest in the work and mercy of God in Christ*, and then we work. First day rest, six days work. God uses material things to reflect spiritual realities (called *sacramentums* by the Church; consider Jesus using clay and spittle, Paul using handkerchiefs, the writing James prescribing the use of oil, God sending a dove to announce His Son, tongues of fire announcing Pentecost, Jesus’ use of bread and wine, water for baptism, etc.). The resurrection and ascension of Christ both occurred on the first day of the week, and announced the completion of the second creation of God,

through Christ . Therefore we rest on the first day, the Lord’s Day, the new “Sabbath”, the new day of rest, signifying our rest in the work of Christ. St. Ignatius of Antioch (AD 35 - 107, and probable disciple of Peter and Paul; friend of Polycarp, who was the disciple of John) says in about AD 105, “*Those who lived according to the old order of things have come to a new hope, no longer keeping the Sabbath, but the Lord’s Day, in which our life is blessed by him and by his death*” (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Magnesians*, 9,1).

Old covenant: work six days then rest one day. New covenant: rest one day, then work six days. This fits perfectly with what we said about the other aspects of the Law, especially the Ten Commandments. What was external law, is now internal action; what was commanded with no grace or strength provided, is now commanded with grace and the Spirit to provided; what was once a negative prohibition, is now a positive command of action. The law has not been changed, the coin has only been flipped from the “letter-side” to the “spirit-side” of the Law. The Law remains, the *rest* of God, now in Christ, remains. This is the good work required of us. We are to rest the first day and work six days. This is the “good works” mentioned in James. But even this is not *our* work, it is the work of Christ in us. It is not *our* abilities, it is the grace of God and His Spirit working within us to enable us to have a *faith working itself out in love*. (Gal. 5:6). We are to work out our salvation, yet it is He that is working in us to will and to do. (Phil. 2:12,13)

In Galatians 5:18 when Paul says, “*But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law*”. What does he mean? Among other things it simply means that the Spirit will give us the power to avoid the actions that violate the negative commands of the Law. Then, since we are living the fruits of the Spirit and loving our brother and our enemy (the whole Law encapsulated) we are already entering into the fullness of the *positive* side of the Law. By loving our neighbor (internal, positive, power from the Spirit to obey) we are not bound by the negative, external commands of the Law for we have already *exceeded* them. The spirit of the Law, the law of grace, *exceeds* the letter of the Law.

For example: **Do not murder!** It is negative, external, no strength provided to obey. Now the flip side of the coin: **Love your neighbor!** It is positive, internal, with God’s grace and Spirit to enable obedience. “Love your neighbor” is the flip side of “do not murder”. It is the same thing said in a positive way. Jesus came to fulfill the Law, to give it to us in its fullness, not to take it away. The character of God is the character of God, it does not change, and His desire for us to conform to it also does not change. He wants His people to be *like* Him, not just to have a declared righteousness. This of course is the foundation of the Christian life, but the actual “becoming righteous” is the subsequent process. We exceed the requirements of the Law, when, by the Spirit, we live out the spirit of the Law, the good works spoken of so often in the Scriptures. Therefore Paul says in Galatians 5:23 after reciting the fruits of the Spirit, “. . . *against such there is no law*”. If the fruits of the Spirit are being manifested in our lives, we are not only obeying the Law, we are exceeding it and against such persons and behavior there is no law.

So, regarding the change in the “Sabbath rest” from seventh day to the first day, is it a

sign that the Law is nullified or made on none effect? No, in fact, just the opposite is true as is said by Jesus in Mt. 5:17-20 (and other multiple New Testament passages). Not only is the law *not* done away with, it is now to be obeyed in its *fullest* reality. In the Old Testament we were to live without *violating* God's character, which is reflected in His Law; in the New Testament we are to live fully *obeying* the spirit of God's Law as revealed in Christ, reflecting God's character. So, just like the command against murder was not rescinded, but is restated in terms of the new covenant, so the Sabbath is readjusted to the first day of the week in commemoration of Christ's resurrection, in terms of the new covenant.

This is a more wholesome view of things than I was ever taught as a Protestant. If you read the NT with these concepts in mind, the whole Bible comes to life. As I said often in [Crossing the Tiber](#), Protestants have accepted an either/or mentality and have negated much of God's truth. I just *love being Catholic* for it is so much richer and more complete. The Bible makes so much more sense. I do not miss the truncated "gospel" of the Fundamentalists.

I hope this all makes sense, it is a hard topic to put on paper, it would be much easier to discuss in person. There is much more that could be said but my wife wants me to get busy around the house, "Saturday morning is for helping out around here, not for writing letters" she says. So here I end. Let's go out to lunch in the next week or two.

Your Friend in the Blood of the Lamb,

Steve Ray

PS I was thinking about the Protestant doctrine of *The Rapture* earlier today. Do you know where that doctrine came from and what year it was invented?