

THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER: FEAR AND OBEY

Introduction

Keeping God's commandments sounds like a wonderfully appropriate thing to do - what better thing could we do than keep God's commandments? But there's a hard question to ask: "What are God's commandments?" Most Christians would agree that some commands aren't obeyed literally (they teach applicable principles instead), but which laws are which? Do we take the "moral" law literally and seek principles in the "civil" and "ceremonial" laws? Or do we draw the line around the Ten Commandments? Or could it be that we should read the entire Law for principles? We'll have to look outside of Ecclesiastes for the answer. The New Testament has much to say about the Law. The word "law" is used 194 times in the New Testament; through most of the New Testament, "law" is used to mean "the Mosaic Law." If the Law is so important to the NT writers and keeping God's commandments is the whole duty of man, we would do well to hone our understanding of this key concept in order to understand it more precisely.

In Christ, we are not under the Law.

Almost without fail, the first thing that comes to mind in this discussion is "I'm not under the law." If not the Law, what controls are there on our lives?

- **Rom. 6.14-15: We are under the reign of _____.**
The contrast in these verses is clear: we are under grace, not Law. Contrasting areas of _____ are a noticeable theme throughout Romans 5-8. Death no longer reigns, life abounds; sin no longer reigns, grace reigns; sin shall not have dominion, you are slaves to righteousness; we don't walk after the flesh, we walk after the Spirit. The last mention of the Law before this passage is Rom. 5.20 - a verse that describes the Law's provocation of the _____ heart. That exasperating role of the Law is contrasted against the reign of grace (5.21). Chapter 7 elaborates on that frustration, making it clear that nothing is wrong with the Law, but sin is using the specific _____ of the Law to aggravate sinners.
We are no longer under the reign of Law and subject to its exasperating influence; we are under the reign of grace and able to walk rightly with God.
- **Gal. 3.17-4.5: The Law is limited in time.**
The Law was not the _____ of God's relationship with man. In fact, God didn't give the Law till 430 years after He made His covenant with Abraham. Mt. Sinai was the beginning of the Law (Ex. 20). There was also a finishing time to the

Law's primacy. It was given "till the seed should come" (3.19) – until Christ came. Paul describes the Law as a _____ schoolmaster. A "schoolmaster" is not a teacher; it is more like a "legal guardian." Rather than classroom education, a schoolmaster's responsibilities tended more toward life-training and discipline. The Law filled that function over a period of time in _____. That era ended when Christ came in the "fulness of time" (4.4). A schoolmaster's oversight of a child ended when the child came of age and _____ as a full-fledged family member. God gave the Law to oversee Israel from Moses to Jesus – then things changed. Rather than being subject to a schoolmaster, God's people have a direct relationship with their Father.

The days of the Law's discipline are over and now God's people know Him through a more personal relationship.

- **Gal. 5.18-23: The Law is replaced by Spirit-led liberty.**

Being led by the Spirit is contrasted with being under the Law. The contrast in the previous verses links being under the Law with being in the _____. Paul seems to be arguing against teaching that required strict Law-keeping for believers. Law-keeping is not the source of _____ over the flesh. Walking in the Spirit is victory over the flesh. Externals aren't enough; will-power doesn't _____; fleshly strength doesn't produce spiritual fruit. Notice what Paul says about the fruit of the Spirit: the Law is not against such things. He's keeping a careful balance here.

Law-based behavior cannot produce real growth, but real spiritual growth doesn't contradict the Law.

Being "under the Law" is a contrast to being under grace, suffering under sin's abuse of the Law, having a personal relationship with the Father and being led by God's Holy Spirit.

In Christ, we must fulfill the Law.

- **Matt. 5.17: Fulfilling the Law is more than just obeying.**

In this famous verse, Christ tells what He came to do to the Law: He came to _____ it. Matthew uses the word "fulfill" sixteen times in his gospel.

Whenever he writes about Christ fulfilling some part of the Old Testament, he's explaining how Jesus was the answer to OT anticipation. The Law set very high expectations – Jesus came and didn't merely meet those expectations; He _____ that His people ought to obey from the heart. Christ didn't come to earth, live righteously and say, "Ok, people, I've fulfilled the Law, don't worry about it anymore." He came and filled every anticipation that the Old Testament had raised, and He taught His disciples to follow His example.

Fulfilling the Law is primarily a matter of the _____.

- **Rom. 8.4: By the Spirit, the Law is fulfilled in our lives.**

He who fulfilled the Law came as a sin-offering for us, _____ us to have the Law fulfilled in us. We can't see the Law fulfilled in our own strength. Just like Galatians 5, we must walk after the Spirit instead of the _____.

We must walk after the _____ so that our lives can meet the Law's anticipation.

- **Rom. 13.8; Gal. 5.14; Jas. 2.9: Love fulfills the Law.**

Christ taught that all the Law hangs on two commandments: love God wholeheartedly and love your neighbor as you love yourself (Matt. 22.37-40). Paul and James _____ that by teaching that the Law is entirely fulfilled when we love one another. The sacrificial love that Scripture describes is a willingness to do what's best for someone else no matter how much it costs you. That's all it takes to fulfill the whole law. After thinking for just a couple moments, we can all sense how far we are from perfectly loving. It's certainly a good thing that the Spirit enables us to fulfill the Law.

The entire Law is fulfilled in one action: _____.

Christ came to fulfill the Law and Scripture teaches us to do the same. We are not obligated to live by every letter of the Mosaic Law, but as we walk in the Spirit, our Christ-like love will fulfill the Law.

Concluding Observations

- **The New Testament treats the Law as a unity.** This should make us hesitant about rely too strongly on the moral-civil-ceremonial division of the Law. Those labels can be helpful, but when we depend heavily on them to sort the Law for us and show us what we have to apply, we've erred. Christ taught that not one jot or tittle would pass away from the Law - without distinguishing one type of command from another. We would do well to seek for a consistent way of interpreting and apply every law, no matter what descriptive label we give it.
- **The Law can only be understood in its fulfillment.** Without looking through Christ, we can't really understand the Law. We don't apply the Law just because it's in the Bible - we apply it because we are in Christ and He is the real fulfillment of the Law. Without understanding His fulfilling work, we will find ourselves unable to grasp the significance and practicality of the Law.
- **There are clear historical boundaries on the Law's predominance.** That time period is clearly over, therefore we must remember that the Law was given in a historical setting that is very different from our own. With all due respect to a sacred cow, I would suggest that no part of the Law should be viewed as "God's permanent revelation of His will for mankind." We don't even apply all of the Ten Commandments letter-perfect. We need to study the original setting and application of each law and understand what it meant for the first readers.
- **Law is a strong connection between the Old and New Testaments.** We don't cast aside any part of the Law. The New Covenant talks about the Law being written on

hearts, not on stone tablets. Christ came to fulfill, not to set aside the Law, and the rest of the New Testament instructs us to fulfill the Law in love, from the heart and by the Spirit. We ought to study and apply each verse of the Law.

- **The Law is profitable for us to apply.** The primary referent of “Scripture” in II Tim. 3.16-17 is the Old Testament. The Mosaic Law is profitable for us. How should we apply it? (1) Study the historical background to understand what the command meant to the original audience. (2) Find the timeless principle behind that specific OT application. (3) Apply the principle specifically to your own situation in life. As you go through these steps, keep your eye out for any application that the New Testament already draws from that OT command. Look for reflections of God’s character in His laws and watch for His ideals for mankind.