

What We Should Learn from the Law

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Introduction.

- A. One of the most distinctive things about the way that we understand the Bible in the Lord's church is our recognition of the difference between the old and new covenants. We recognize that when Christ died on the cross, He instituted a new covenant and a new law, causing the old covenant and the old law to become obsolete. That's why we don't tithe here, even though it's in the Old Testament. That's why we don't use instruments of music here, even though they're in the Old Testament. Neither one of those practices is carried forward in the New Testament, so we regard them as having been replaced, just like the rest of the Law.
- B. As always, though, it is possible to take this Bible truth and overextend it. We see evidence of just such an overextension in the disdain that some brethren have for the Old Law. They're absolutely correct in regarding themselves as under the law of Christ instead. However, when they refuse to study the Law of Moses or recognize that it is a valid topic for study, they go beyond what the Scripture teaches.
- C. This is most evident in one of the most familiar Scriptures in the entire Bible: 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Not only does the Old Testament fall under the category of "all Scripture," but it is actually what Paul is specifically talking about in this instance. In context, Paul has been talking about the Scriptures that Timothy had studied in his childhood, a time when the New Testament hadn't even been written yet. This means, then, that if we don't study the Old Testament, we are neglecting the tools that God has given us so that we can be equipped for every good work. Let's not make that mistake. Let's see this evening what we should learn from the Law.

I. About God.

- A. We can group the lessons of the Law into three main areas of usefulness, and the first of these areas is that it teaches us about God. Certainly, the New Testament has a great deal to reveal about God, but the Old Testament has a great deal more to teach us. In fact, it contains a great deal of absolutely critical information about God that is not repeated in the New Testament, most likely because God saw no reason to record it again. For example, in the lesson that I preached several weeks ago about God, three-fourths of the Scriptures I used actually came from the Old Testament because those were the best sources.
- B. This is exactly why we see an inspired speaker from the New Testament quoting from the Old Testament to explain God to his audience. This occurs during Stephen's address to the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:48-50. Stephen here is trying to counteract a problem that these leaders of the Jews have. They are convinced that the temple is especially important because it contains the holiness of God. Stephen rebuts this idea, not through some original logic of his own, but through quoting from the same Law that his audience professes to honor. Today, if we want to understand God ourselves or explain Him to someone else, we need the Law.
- C. Similarly, the Law tells us about the nature of God as revealed by His interaction with man. That's extremely important to our understanding of Him today, because it shows us what we can expect from Him too. It's like when you're looking at buying a house, and one of the houses on the list has a basement, and you want to know whether the basement floods or not. You can look for cracks in the walls all you want, you can look at the area around the house all you want, but the very best way to tell whether the basement actually floods is by learning whether it's flooded in the past, and predicting based on that pattern. Let me tell you, friends: God is a lot more certain than a leaky basement. He does not change, so if we know how He has reacted in the past, we can predict how He will react in the future. Without the Law, that's just not possible.
- D. In fact, the Hebrews writer makes exactly this argument, based on the record of the Law, in Hebrews 2:2-3. Under the Old Law, which was a lesser covenant, God still punished every sin and demanded justice. We know that our covenant is greater than that one because it was sealed with the blood of Christ. We can predict, then, that since God demanded justice under the Law of Moses, He certainly will under the law of Christ. We can apply this logic not just in this specific example, but generally, to learn what God will do with us.

II. About History.

- A. Just as the Old Law tells us a great deal about the interventions of God in history, it also tells us a lot about history itself. This process begins with some foundational truths that are revealed only in the Law of Moses. It's the Law that tells us where we came from, why we exist, and a great deal about how we are to behave.
- B. Look, for example, at the way that Jesus uses the Law in Matthew 19:4-6. The argument that Jesus makes here, and it's an excellent argument, is completely based on the authority of the Old Law. Without the Law, Jesus' entire point collapses. Here's what He does. He refers His audience back to a story with which they are all familiar, the story of Adam and Eve, and reminds them that the text describes how God took those two and made them into one flesh. From this, Jesus reasons that if God is the one behind such a profound joining, it must not be something that man dares to separate. Therefore, divorce for any other reason besides adultery

is wrong. Unless we pay attention to the account of Genesis, we miss the point of Jesus' argument. Without the Old Law, we don't understand why it is that divorce is so wrong. I daresay that there are many in the Lord's church even today who would do well to pay much closer attention to what the Law says on this.

- C. The history that the Law records is also useful to us because it points us to the example of godly men whom we can imitate. Certainly, there are differences in the way that God expected men to live then as opposed to now, but those differences are far outweighed by the similarities.
- D. That's why James encourages us by pointing us to Old Testament examples of perseverance in James 5:10-11. Job lived in the patriarchal era, so we know little about what God expected from him. The prophets were products of the Mosaic era, and lived under a different law. Nonetheless, the record of their suffering is priceless to us today because it shows us that if we remain steadfast in serving God, even when times are hard, we will see His compassion. Who can say how many thousands of Christians have turned for consolation to the story of Job in the midst of financial hardship and personal tragedy? Who can say how many Christians have read the story of Elijah's perseverance in the midst of a wicked people and been encouraged to keep going, despite the wickedness that surrounds all of us today? Without the Law, none of that happens.
- E. Just as it is important to pay attention to the positive examples from the Law, it is also important to learn from the negative examples it provides. This is perhaps especially important in our society today. Many around us have a Pollyanna view of God. They believe that He will bless us if we do His will, but if we don't do His will, that's OK too, and He'll bless us anyway. There's no better place to turn to rebut this idea than the pages of the Old Law, because they are absolutely filled with wicked people who dared to disobey and suffered for it.
- F. This is quite apparent from Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10:5-6. In this context, he is comparing Christians to the children of Israel during their wilderness wanderings from Egypt to Canaan. Because we're on a similar journey, he says, we need to be careful not to make the same mistakes. He goes on to catalogue the sins the Israelites committed, and encourages us to be warned by their example today. They sinned and were destroyed for it, so if we don't want to be destroyed, we should short-circuit the process by not sinning. Sadly, the Exodus is far from the only example of disobedience by God's people in the Old Testament. We must learn from the ungodliness of everyone from Abihu to Zedekiah if we wish to avoid their fate, and those are lessons that we just don't get without the Old Law. It's the only way to understand what it really means to be holy.
- G. Finally, we should learn from the history of the Old Law by paying attention to what the Bible calls types and antitypes. A type is just something that leaves a dent, like poking a pencil into Play-Doh, and the antitype is the dent that it leaves. The Bible uses this language to describe things from the Old Law that prefigure something from the new law. We just talked about a type a minute ago. Because we can compare our journey to heaven to the Israelites' journey to Canaan in many different ways, that journey is a type of ours.
- H. We see Paul explicitly using this type-antitype language in Romans 5:14-15. In this context, Paul is trying to explain the impact of the grace of Christ, and he uses a familiar Old Testament character, Adam, to illustrate his point. Adam committed the first sin. By eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he left all of humankind exposed to sin too, an exposure that condemned us to death when we chose to sin. That's the type. By contrast, the death of Christ on the cross for our sins gave us all the opportunity to have life through Him. That's the antitype. You see it? Death through Adam, life through Christ. Many of the most difficult Biblical concepts are illuminated in this way, which wouldn't be possible without the Law.

III. In Prophecy.

- A. As important as the history of the Law is to our understanding of the Christian system, it is every bit as important that we know what the Law has to say about prophecy. For instance, Christians since the very beginning have used the words of the Old Testament prophets to demonstrate from those passages that Jesus is from God. In fact, the very idea that God would send a Christ, an Anointed One, to earth is something contained wholly within the Old Testament. We see one such prophecy about the Messiah quoted by Peter in Acts 3:22-24. Here, he refers to a prophecy that Moses made in the book of Deuteronomy that another prophet would come, and that God would require the people to listen to this prophet.
- B. This prophecy was critically important then, and it's critically important today. After all, when somebody shows up at the front door and tells us he's the cable guy when we aren't having any problems with the cable, we're naturally suspicious of that. In the same way, when some prophet shows up claiming to be from God, and God hasn't said that any prophet is going to come, we should be suspicious too. Exactly the opposite is true of Christ. He is the most well documented prophet in history, and the hundreds of Old Testament prophecies that described Him, that He fulfilled in every detail, give us reason to listen to His words.
- C. It's just as significant that the Old Testament prophesied that a new covenant was going to come also. We see the Hebrews writer use one of these prophecies in Hebrews 8:6-8. Here, he's trying to demonstrate to his Jewish compatriots that the Old Law was never intended to be permanent, and in support of this, he is able to quote from the Old Law itself, that instead, a new covenant that replaced the old had been part of the plan from the very beginning. This too helps establish that the law of Christ is from God.

Conclusion. If these evidences, combined with many others, convince you to submit to the Lord, don't delay.