

The Statutes of the Lord

M. W. Bassford, 5-1-11

One of the most distinctive features of the way that the Lord's church reads the Bible is the way that we distinguish between the law of Moses and the law of Christ. Today, we aren't concerned with clean and unclean food, or tithing, or instrumental music, because we recognize that all of those things belong only to the Old Law. They were nailed to the cross with Jesus, and because of that, God does not expect us to obey them any longer.

However, even while we correctly pay attention to the differences between these two legal codes, we must not forget the similarities. As we've seen repeatedly throughout our study of Deuteronomy so far, this certainly applies to the covenants that underlie the laws. The agreement that we make with God is basically the same as the bargain that the Israelites made with God, and the same kinds of behavior will either fulfill that agreement or violate it.

It is also true, though, that these similarities between Old and New Testaments often go all the way down to specific laws. As Paul tells us, the Old Law was holy and good. When Christ replaced it, He didn't tear the whole thing down and start over. Instead, He incorporated the highest moral precepts of Moses' law into His law. Sometimes, those moral precepts are explicitly repeated; at other times, they appear in principles that the law of God has always taught.

Because this is so, we have much to learn today from a study even of the laws of the Old Testament. Of course, in this study, we must be careful not to go beyond the doctrine of Christ, but once we recognize that a teaching or principle has been preserved, a return to the language of the Old Testament often helps to clarify what we must do. Just like we learn more about the life of Christ by considering it from the perspective of four different gospel writers, we can also learn more about the law of Christ by looking at the law of Moses. Let's turn, then, to the statutes of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 12-17

The first of these teachings that are still relevant to us today concerns **BLOOD**. Moses addresses this subject in Deuteronomy 12:20, 23. This teaching has two main applications for us. First, we aren't to eat blood today either, because the life is still in the blood. Among other places, we see this in the New Testament in Acts 15. This means that it's sinful for Christians to eat blood pudding, blood sausage, and other foods like that. However, this isn't a commandment that we have to worry about violating by accident. Sometimes, when we buy a package of steak at the store, there's this reddish liquid at the bottom, and we might worry that it's blood. However, our brother Marshall, who's an investigator for the USDA, and knows everything about meat that's worth knowing, cleared that up for me. He told me that that liquid is just the natural meat juices, not blood. Meat that has been improperly drained and still has blood in it will have a unwholesome appearance and smell, and it won't make it out to the grocery-store shelves.

The second application of this passage, though, comes not at the supermarket, but at the cross. Because the life is in the blood, blood has tremendous spiritual significance. Thus, the blood of Christ can make atonement for our sins. When He shed His lifeblood on the cross, that made it possible for God to exchange His life for our life. As a result, the fruit of the vine that represents that blood is one of the elements of the Lord's Supper, and through it we honor Him.

From there, let's turn our attention to the laws concerning **JUSTICE**. In this area, let's consider Deuteronomy 16:19-20. In very eloquent terms, this passage emphasizes the importance of justice to God's people, and it is no less vital to our spiritual lives today. This context speaks specifically of justice in a courtroom context, but all of us, whether judges or no, have a responsibility to live justly. This means that the Christian must never cheat or take advantage of anyone. If we buy something at the store, and the clerk gives us more change than we are due, we don't get to rejoice in our unexpected good fortune. The money doesn't belong to us, and we don't get to keep it. We must behave in this way no matter what. I recently had the dubious privilege of waiting on hold for an hour and a half so that I could argue with the IRS that my tax refund was too big. I didn't succeed in convincing anyone, even though I was right, and afterwards, I felt kind of like an idiot for even trying, but we must be guided not by the shrewdness of the world, but the justice of God.

The laws of Deuteronomy also have a lot to tell **LEADERS**. Let's read together from Deuteronomy 17:18-19. This passage imposes a unique requirement on the kings that Israel would soon have. They had to write out for themselves a copy of the book of the law, and they had to read from that copy every day of their lives. This wasn't for the common people; this was just for the kings. God's leaders had to be steeped in God's law.

This is every bit as important for leaders today. Whether we lead in the workplace, in the church, or in the family, the foremost guide for our conduct must be the word of God. Every leadership decision that we make must be a decision that is pleasing to Him, and the only way that we can make certain of that is by writing out our own copy of His book, not on a scroll, but in our hearts. This method of decision-making might seem foolish and impractical to our worldly counterparts, but it will work to our benefit in two critical ways. First, it will protect us from the long-term dangers of evil and sin. Second, and even more importantly, it will ensure that our leadership glorifies the One who made us leaders.

Deuteronomy 18-22

The next especially relevant section of the laws of Deuteronomy addresses **THE MESSIAH**. We see this in the promise that God makes to Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18-19. As we study this text, the first thing that we must notice is that this is not just a promise to send garden-variety prophets. Instead, God very plainly says that He will raise up a prophet like Moses, and even among the prophets, Moses' accomplishments were stupendous. He worked massive miracles that no one had ever seen before. He brought the law and the covenants to the people of Israel. Any prophet who could rightly be described as being "like Moses" had to operate on that same spectacular level too.

For this reason, the Jews and even the Samaritans at the time of Christ understood this prophecy to refer to the Messiah, and, of course, it was in Jesus that the prophecy was fulfilled. This is important for two main reasons. First, it shows that Jesus didn't pop up out of nowhere. Thousands of years before His birth, this Scripture predicted His accomplishments and warned the people to listen to Him. Second, it shows that if a new prophet is going to arise, God is going to warn us to expect that prophet. From beginning to end of the New Testament, though, not one inspired writer predicts that another great prophet will arise. For this reason, any man who claims to be a prophet should be dismissed.

Moses describes another test that we should put such men to in his discussion of **FALSE PROPHETS**. Look with me at Deuteronomy 18:21-22. In other words, if a man wants to be recognized as a prophet, first, he needs to make falsifiable predictions. Any fool can say, "Hard times are coming", or "There will be great tragedies in the world next year", because hard times are always coming and tragedies are always occurring. A prediction of the future must be much more specific than that to qualify as a genuine prediction. Second, in these falsifiable predictions, the prophet must have a 100 percent accuracy rating. Everything that he predicts must take place. If a prophet is genuinely inspired by God, he won't have any trouble living up to that standard, because God knows everything that will ever happen. However, if a man is wrong about even one event, that shows that he is not working by inspiration and is a false prophet. The Israelites were to kill false prophets. Today, we can simply be content with ignoring them and warning others about them.

In the next chapter over, Moses raises a very important point about **WITNESSES**. It appears in Deuteronomy 19:15. Like all of the moral teachings of Scripture, this is just good common sense. If one man brings an accusation against another, and only the accuser offers evidence to support the accusation, how can we possibly know whether he's telling the truth or not? It's just the word of the accuser against the word of the accused. However, when multiple witnesses repeat the same accusation, it becomes much more likely that the accusation is correct.

In the New Testament, this principle finds two main applications. First, it governs the way that we deal with misconduct in the church. Before we can withdraw from a brother, two or three Christians must approach him with evidence of his sin. Similarly, we don't have the right to bring an accusation against an elder at all without confirmation from two or three witnesses. Second, on a much larger scale, the entire New Testament relies on multiple witnesses to confirm the gospel of Christ. From the beginning of Jesus' ministry to the end of the book of Acts, God's messengers always went out two by two to support one another's testimony. Jesus Himself appealed to the witnesses of the Old Testament and the miracles that He performed as evidence that He was the Messiah. We don't just have one gospel in our Bibles. We have four, so that the multiple witnesses of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John can persuade us of the truth. These are just a few examples out of many. Once you start looking for it, the pattern of multiple witnesses is everywhere.

Another decree of the Law of Moses, one that turned out to have more significance than even Moses likely expected, is the law concerning **HANGING**. We find it in Deuteronomy 21:22-23. This clearly makes death by hanging even more ominous than it would otherwise be. Not only is the convicted man killed for his crimes, but he is also cursed by God. This tells us, then, that the method of the death of Jesus is just as significant as the fact of the death itself. Jesus could have been killed by beheading or stoning or any number of other ways, but only death by crucifixion, by hanging from the wood of a cross, would cause Him to become accursed of God. This is important because the curse that Jesus bore on the cross was not the curse that accompanied His own misconduct, but the curse that we brought on ourselves through sin. Because Jesus took on that curse and died for it, we can now receive the blessing of God.

Finally, Moses tells us something that we must hear about our responsibility to our **BRETHREN**. Let's read together from Deuteronomy 22:1, 3. This is an interesting difference between human law and God's law. Let's say that you can't swim, but you fall into a swimming pool and start drowning. I'm standing on the edge of the swimming pool, I have a life preserver and a coil of rope at my feet, but instead of helping you, I just stand there and watch you drown. Under the law of the United States, I have not done anything wrong. We are not required by the laws of this country to take action to help someone in need. However, that's not the case for Christians, in our dealings with people generally, but especially in our dealings with our brethren. When we see a way in which we could help a brother and we have the opportunity to help him, God expects us to extend that help. We can't just ignore the problem and say it's none of our business, because according to God, it is our business. This applies to difficulties of every sort, both physical and spiritual, and it follows logically from the great commandment to love. Apathy might stand and watch, but love will help.