

## Can we eat prawns?

### The Christian and the Law of Moses (1)

#### The Importance of the topic

*We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. (1 Tim 1:8)*

<sup>6</sup>*Some... have turned to meaningless talk.*

<sup>7</sup>*They want to be teachers of the law,  
but they do not know what they are talking about  
or what they so confidently affirm. (1 Tim 1:6-7)*

*One of the most difficult, complex and important questions facing Christians is how to understand and apply the Old Testament Law today. This is of vital practical and apologetic importance. Unless Christians understand how the law is relevant to them they will struggle to profit when they read the detailed legislation of the Pentateuch<sup>1</sup>. The specific statutes, precepts and commands will seem alien, irrelevant and boring. In some cases they may even seem offensive and immoral, for example the commands regarding the conquest of the Promised Land.*

*The apparent immorality of some Old Testament laws in the view of contemporary society, and the seemingly inconsistent way Christians apply them (for example disregarding food laws today but insisting that gay sex is prohibited), are exploited by contemporary atheists as reasons for refusing to believe in the existence of the God of the Bible. One evangelist, who has recently undertaken two university missions, told me that at every meeting he was challenged by members of the LGBT society about the laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy regarding homosexuality. He said that these opponents often knew their Bibles better than the Christians, who did not always know how to respond to their objections.<sup>2</sup>*

#### What is meant by 'The Law'?

The *torah* (teaching) given by God to Israel through Moses in the period following the Exodus.

- the five books of Moses (the *Pentateuch*) in their entirety.
- or more specifically the 'legal' material between Exodus 20 and the end of Deuteronomy
- the stipulations of the Sinai covenant
  - The 10 commandments (Ex 20)
  - The book of the covenant (Ex 21-23)
  - The tabernacle instructions (Ex 25-31)
  - Laws on sacrifice (Lev 1-7)
  - Laws on uncleanness and its treatment (Lev 11-16)
  - Prescriptions for practical holiness (Lev 17-27)
  - Further laws (Num 6, 10, 15, 18, 19, 28-30, 35)
  - Restatement of the main elements of the law (Deuteronomy)

#### What are we to do with the Law (the commandments and regulations of the Sinai covenant)?

An issue that faced the early church – Acts 15

v5 – the issue

v10-11 – Peter's response

v19-21 – the conclusion

<sup>1</sup> The first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis to Deuteronomy

<sup>2</sup> from [www.john-stevens.com/2013/06/the-law-in-deuteronomy-how-does-law.html](http://www.john-stevens.com/2013/06/the-law-in-deuteronomy-how-does-law.html) (accessed 7 Oct 2019)

The Big Point:

**1. Jesus came to fulfil the law (Matt 5:17ff.)**

Fulfilment does not mean destruction or abolition of the law, but nonetheless:

- Jesus teaches with an authority independent of and superseding that of Moses (Matt 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44)
- The teaching of Jesus becomes the measure for what it means to be obedient to God (Matt 7:21-27)
- Jesus requires obedience to *his* commandments (Matt 28:20; John 14:21, 23-24; 15:10-12)
- He is the 'telos' (goal/end) of the law (Rom 10:4)

**2. The law can only be properly understood from a salvation-history perspective<sup>3</sup>**

**Galatians 3:15-4:7**

*Group Question: What do we learn about the Law from these verses?*

3:15-18

3:19

3:21

3:22-23

3:24

3:25

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<sup>3</sup> see the on-line article by John Stevens

4:1-7

*Paul's purpose then, is to show that the law had the purpose of regulating the life of God's people for a set period of time. It imposed rules, guarded behaviour and served to reveal, confine under, and stimulate sin. All this was intended by God as preparation for the era of fulfilment which has now dawned in Christ, the era in which slaves have become sons through the redemption brought by Christ and the gift of the Spirit.<sup>4</sup>*

*See the Appendix for the relationship between the covenants*

### **3. Christ's coming brings about a whole new situation with respect to the place of the law (of Moses) in the life of the people of God**

#### **(a) With respect to Justification**

- The gospel declares that 'through Jesus everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses' (Acts 13:39)
- The gospel reveals 'a righteousness from God apart from law to which the law and the prophets testify. This righteousness comes by faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe' (Rom 3:21-22)

#### **(b) With respect to Sanctification**

- Christians are not 'under [the] law' but 'under grace ' (Rom 6:14, 15; 1 Cor 9:20; Gal 3:23; 4:4, 5, 21: 5:18)
- Christians have died to the law to belong to Christ and serve in the new way of the Spirit (Rom 7:1-6)

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas Moo: "The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ." [p.214] In *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testament. Essays in honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg. Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988.

- Living by the Spirit enables Christians to live the life of love that fulfils the law (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:13-14)

**4. The Christian, released from the law of Moses, is not outside God's law, but under 'the law of Christ' (Gal 6:2; 1 Cor 9:20-21)**

1 Cor 9:20-21

Group Questions

- (a) What is the law that Paul is not under?
- (b) How does he use his freedom?
- (c) What is the law that he is not free from?

'The Law of Christ' must mean something like 'all that is required of the Christian by Christ'

THEREFORE we must distinguish between *the Mosaic Law* (the ruling code for life under the old covenant) and *law as a theological category*. i.e. God's word in its commanding aspects.

- not being under the Mosaic Law does not equate to a state of lawlessness
- being under grace places us under obligation to Christ ('*under the law of Christ*')

## APPENDIX

