

I WANT TO KNOW MY BIBLE

Our Relationship To Old Testament Law

READING: Deuteronomy

TEXT: Acts 10:9-16

INTRODUCTION: If you are on track in our chronological reading of the Bible, then Friday you finished with the reading of the Books of the Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. I offer you my congratulations, because sadly most people, even most Christians, who set out to read through the Bible never make it to the end of Deuteronomy. If you are not quite there, let me encourage you. There is an end. And let me encourage all of you: there is a blessing in it, and our primary purpose in this sermon today is to see that blessing. Because today I am going to preach about our relationship to the Old Testament Law.

I begin with an acknowledgement that there is a ton of **confusion about how** a born again Christian is **to deal with the law**. Some think

- **Because Christians are not under the law, the law has no value today in the life of a follower of Christ.**
- **Because Jesus said not a jot or a tittle of the law would pass away until all is fulfilled, the law is equally as valid for everybody today as it was in days of the Old Testament.**
- **Some parts like the Ten Commandments are still valid.**
- **Other parts like the laws of sacrifice are no longer valid.**

Although many are confused by this issue, they do not need to be. Actually, **the Scripture is very clear on what the role of the Old Testament Law is in the life of a Christian, and what it is not.** The result of learning that is not just to make you a super smart believer, but it actually allows everything we have read since mid-August to become a blessing rather than a burden.

The earliest followers of Jesus had to face this question. The apostles were Jews. They had been raised to keep the law, even to believe that eternal life was in the keeping of the law. Jesus had clearly shown them that life was not in the law, but on the other hand He quoted the law and honored the law. So what were they to do with the law?

So God gave them the answer and we find it in Acts 10:9-16.

Acts 10:9-16 ⁹ The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. ¹⁰ Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping

things, and birds of the air. ¹³ And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." ¹⁵ And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." ¹⁶ This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

Now the immediate application of the message of this vision was that Peter was not to consider the three Gentiles that were at that very moment knocking on his door to be unclean. Therefore Peter was to accompany these three Gentiles back to the home of Cornelius, a Roman whom God was about to save through faith in Christ.

However, there is certainly a broader message for us here. The Old Testament Law had declared a good number of animals to be unclean, not to be eaten or even touched. Now the Lord tells Peter to eat some of the unclean animals because the Lord had cleansed them. Clearly there was a change from God's command in the OT law to this NT day in which the Lord spoke to Peter. So what is that change?

To answer this question thoroughly, we must go beyond this passage. One of the best passages answering this question is in Hebrews 8:7-8.

Hebrews 8:7-8, ¹³ ⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. ⁸ Because finding fault with them, He says: "*Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- ...*" ¹³ In that He says, "*A new covenant,*" He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Let me try to help summarize for you what these two passages show us.

I. THE OLD COVENANT OF THE LAW HAS BEEN REPLACED BY THE NEW COVENANT.

A. Remember about the covenant of the law:

- 1. Established while Israel was camped at Sinai.** Here are the actual words of the covenant: Exodus 19:5-6 ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. ⁶ And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."
- 2. This covenant is called by several names.**
 - a. The law
 - b. The old covenant
 - c. The Mosaic covenant

d. The Sinai covenant

- 3. This covenant was conditional. "...if you will obey... and keep My covenant, then..."**
- 4. This was never a covenant of personal salvation.** People were never saved by the keeping of the law.
- 5. It was a covenant establishing Israel as a holy nation to serve the Lord as a priestly kingdom (missionary nation) for the purpose of reaching the other nations of the world.**

B. Israel broke this covenant. By the time of Jeremiah, around 600 B.C., God declared the covenant broken. **Jeremiah 31:31-32** ³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— ³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord.

- 1. The old covenant, the covenant of the law was in effect for less than 900 years, from approximately 1461 B.C. to 597 B.C.**

People often think that there were two ages of covenants: the old covenant that went from creation to Christ and the new covenant that goes from Christ to eternity.

But the first part of that conventional knowledge is wrong. There was right and wrong and relationship with God for thousands of years before the old covenant of the law was even established.

C. The New Covenant established by Christ has begun.

- 1. The shedding of Jesus' blood on the cross initiated the new covenant.**

Matthew 26:28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

II. BELIEVERS ARE NOT REQUIRED BY GOD TO KEEP THE OT LAW AS THE JEWS WERE IN OT TIMES.

Galatians 5:16-18 ¹⁶ I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

III. THE LAW STILL HAS TWO PURPOSES FOR THE CHRISTIAN:

to reveal the character of God and

to picture the work of Christ.

Matthew 5:17-18 ¹⁷ “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

A. To reveal the character of God.

1. Moral absolutes were established by God, based on His character, before the law was given to Moses.
 - a. Before the Law of Moses was given...
 - b. murder was wrong
 - c. stealing was wrong
 - d. lying was wrong
 - e. etc.
2. These were not made wrong by being codified in the law.
3. They were codified in the law because they were wrong.
4. They were wrong because they were in conflict with the character of God.
5. The law is still useful to us in revealing the character of God.

This is one reason Paul says that the law is a tutor that brings us to Christ, because it reveals our sin in contrast to the holy character of God.

Galatians 3:24-25 ²⁴ Therefore the law was our tutor to *bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

B. To picture the work of Christ.

1. The laws of cleanliness
 - a. **The OT required ceremonial cleanliness.**
 - Abstention from certain foods labeled by God as unclean.
 - Freedom from certain diseases, injuries, or physical manifestations.
 - No contact with things that are unclean.
 - Uncleanness was usually a temporary condition.

b. God clearly recognized a distinction between ceremonial cleanliness and moral cleanliness.

Psalm 24:3-4 Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has **clean** hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully.

A person who was ceremonially unclean could not participate in the tabernacle or temple worship because that worship was a picture of the person and work of Christ. A ceremonially unclean person (even through no fault of their own) would taint the picture.

But there was no implication that the person who was ceremonially unclean was spiritually unclean nor was there any prohibition of private worship or fellowship with God.

**c. The message of Peter's vision:
There is no more "ceremonial cleanliness;" man is cleansed by Christ.**

The reason: There is no need to keep repeating the picture of the person and work of Christ. He has come in person and completed His work.

Those who trust Him and the cleansing of His shed blood are made truly clean in their hearts and pure before God.

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

d. Concerning the dietary laws today.

We are no longer required to keep OT dietary laws.

In some (but not necessarily all) cases of God's dietary restrictions, we may discover that there was a health benefit in the requirement. If so, we may choose to practice the restriction for good health but it should not be seen as tied to making us clean before the Lord.

2. The laws of sacrifice

The Laws of sacrifice were also given to teach certain principles and picture the person and work of Christ. For instance...

The slaying of the Passover lamb pictured the slaying of Christ Who is the Lamb of God and also our Passover.

The blood sprinkled on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant portrayed in advance.

Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins.

The offering of the blood of Christ in the heavenly Holy of Holies to pay the price for our sins.

The blood offering for sin opens the way for a relationship with God.

Now that Christ has Himself become our sacrifice and shed His blood on the cross for our sins, there is no need to keep repeating the picture. We have the reality.

CONCLUSION: This demonstrates to us once again that **God's great desire is that we might know Him,** and

the way to come to truly know Him is through what Christ has done for us on Calvary's cross.

After we have come into a personal relationship with Him through faith in Christ, **the single most helpful thing we can do to learn more about God and His ways is to read the book He has sent us: the Bible.**