

8. Covenant Law (2Q 2021—The Promise: God’s Everlasting Covenant)

Biblical Material: Exod. 19:6, Isa. 56:7, Heb. 2:9, Deut. 4:13, Deut. 7:9, Deut. 10:13, Amos 3:3, Gen. 18:19.

Quotes

- It is no coincidence that Christian fundamentalist movements worldwide seek a return to Old Testament laws - because they fundamentally reject Christ as the New Covenant—which replaced all that. They are not Christians—they are Leviticans. *Christina Engela*
- Though, according to His right and power over man, God could prescribe obedience in all things... yet, that He might elicit from man voluntary and free obedience, which alone is grateful to Him, it was His will to enter into a covenant with him by which God required obedience. *James Arminius*
- By electing a covenant people, God demonstrated to humankind that striving for him is not a vain thing. He rewards those individuals who seek him according to his divine attributes, the highest wisdom, and the ultimate standard of fairness. *James Mikotajczyk*
- The exodus was not a movement from slavery to freedom, but from slavery to covenant. Redemption was for relationship with the redeemer, to serve his interests and his purposes in the world. *Christopher Wright*
- God doesn’t want us to have rigid rituals with Him. In the new covenant, He is more interested in having a relationship with us. *Joseph Prince*
- Most Christians are still living with an Old Testament view of their heart. Jeremiah 17:9 says, ‘My heart is deceitfully wicked.’ No, it’s not. Not after the work of Christ, because the promise of the new covenant is a new heart. *John Eldredge*

Questions

Is the Law of Moses still valid for Christians? Is it true that this law was “nailed to the Cross” as some Christians affirm? What about all the ceremonies—what is their validity today? What did Jesus mean when he said the people of his day didn’t really follow the Law of Moses? What implications does this have for us?

Bible summary

“For me you will be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6 FBV). God invites all to his Temple, a house of prayer for all nations (Isa. 56:7). Heb. 2:9 is referenced, presumably to indicate fulfillment of the covenant law. Deut. 4:13 speaks of the Ten Commandments, and then gives them in Deut. 5. God promises to keep his covenant of love (Deut. 7:9). “He wants you to keep the commandments and regulations of the Lord that I am giving you today for your own good.” Deut. 10:13 FBV. Amos 3:3 points out that both parties need to agree. “I’ve chosen him so that he will teach his sons and their families to follow the way of the Lord by doing what is right and good, so that I, the Lord, can do for Abraham what I promised.” Gen. 18:19 FBV.

Comment

The Law of Moses really means everything that God told Moses to communicate with the people of Israel about how they were to live and how they were to worship God. So in reality this is not from Moses, it only came through him.

So this includes all the instructions regarding offerings and sacrifices, the tabernacle and its services, the instructions regarding inheritances and civil laws, as well as the Ten Commandments. It is hard to separate out all the various aspects. We may refer to the ceremonial law and the moral law but they were very much seen as one.

Consequently our attitude to the Law of Moses is varied. Some dismiss it altogether. However in terms of ethics and morality, surely those fundamental principles still stand. When it comes to all the details about sin offerings and such aspects of worship in the tabernacle, the specifics are no longer applicable since the tabernacle and the Temple are no more. The rending of the Temple veil showed that this system had come to an end. But what about other aspects such as health laws? Some of the basic principles regarding the prevention of infection and preferable foods can still be seen as relevant. While certain meats may not be ceremonially “unclean” any more, would you really want to be eating birds like “eagle, griffon vulture, bearded vulture, buzzard, kite and similar birds of prey, any raven or crow, tawny owl, long-eared owl, gulls, any kind of hawk, little owl, fish owl, eagle owl, barn owl, desert owl, Egyptian vulture, storks and any kind of heron, hoopoe, and bats... rats, mice, any kind of large lizard, gecko, monitor lizard, wall lizard, skinks, and chameleon.” (Lev. 11:13-19, 29, 30 FBV). Sounds like an easy way to get sick!

More significantly, observance of the Law of Moses in all its details was seen by the teachers of the law in Jesus’ time as the way of salvation. As long as you were following all these rules, God’s laws, then you were OK. Jesus came to show that this was not true. The rich young ruler had kept all the rules, but Jesus showed where he was lacking—not in rule-keeping, but his dependence on wealth. Even the Scriptures couldn’t save, said Jesus. “You search the Scriptures because you think that through them you’ll gain eternal life. But the evidence they give is in support of me!” John 5:39 FBV.

In the end, the Law shows us what is right and good. But it is God who changes us, heals us, and saves us. It’s not about jumping hurdles or going through hoops. It’s about knowing God, and trusting in Jesus whom he sent. As we look into the mirror of the Law, and see our defects, we come to the only one who can remake us into his image and prepare us for all eternity.

Ellen White comments

If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; they would have kept God’s law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses. {PP 364}

Christ is the sinner’s only hope. There is no comfort for the soul in looking at the good works he has done; for they are all mixed with pride and sin, and by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. In the righteousness of Christ the sinner may find refuge; for the repenting soul may lay hold of the merits of Christ, and find a remedy for sin, a healing for the wounds of the soul. {RH, June 14, 1892 par. 1}