

Do all of God's commandments still apply today?

I remember going to the school ball in year 12. I was scrawny, I looked 13 and I had no date. I now have a date, the other two remain. However, I was excited to hang out with friends and create memories that would last a life time. We decided to travel to the Ellerslie Convention Centre in style that year by booking a horse and carriage that would trot us along the street to arrive in royal fashion.

I didn't think too much about how the horse and carriage would actually navigate its way through Auckland streets because, well I was a teenage boy, and we don't think about anything really.

I remember approaching a really busy intersection in our carriage as I was giving people my best Queen Elizabeth impersonation when it dawned on me. How were we expected to get across with all these cars zooming around us?

Then, right before my very eyes, one of the horse trainers walked out into the middle of the intersection, lifted her hand to stop the traffic, and we waltzed on through. I couldn't believe it!

When we arrived, I asked the horse trainer how we were able to do that and she said 'oh horses have right of way on all New Zealand roads'. I understood how that would make sense in the olden days, but did that law still apply today? Turns out that even to this day, you are breaking the law if you don't give way to a horse on the road.

Who would have thought that such an old law still applied today? Who would have thought that even though it seems irrelevant, we are deemed guilty if we are to break it?

There are some other laws that were established for specific people at a specific time, YET THEY STILL APPLY TODAY. Brought to you by our good friends, AMERICA.

Funny American laws that actually exist.

- 1) If you cut down a cactus you could face 25 years in prison (Arizona)
- 2) Policemen are allowed to bite a dog if they think it will calm it down. (Ohio)
- 3) It is illegal to sell your eyeballs (Texas)
- 4) You may not sell toothpaste and a toothbrush to the same customer on a Sunday (Rhode Island)
- 5) If you are found stealing soap, you must wash yourself until the bar of soap has been completely used up. (Arizona)

People are generally good people. Most people are out there to follow the law, to do the right thing, to keep out of trouble. For most of us, we understand that honouring God requires obedience and faithfulness. I find it quite easy to understand what God is asking me to do and the way that he is calling me to live.... Most of the time!

- Don't murder, tick
- Don't commit adultery, tick
- Don't shave the sides of my head... ummmm
- Don't muzzle my Ox while it treads grain...???
- Don't steal, tick

There are 613 different laws in the bible. Does God really expect us to follow every single one of them? What if I haven't even heard of 90% of them? Do all of God's laws still apply today? And if they don't all apply, how do we know which ones still do, and which ones don't anymore?

In order to navigate this and make sense of it all, we have to start at the beginning with the knowledge that God created humanity for relationship. He never wanted minions, we weren't an experiment, but we were created to know him, and to be close to him. We were created to be holy, as he is holy.

So God has his chosen people, the nation of Israel. God wants them to be set apart, to be the nation that he would first work through before reaching, saving, and blessing every nation.

So rather than releasing them to their own governance, God begins to establish different sets of laws that each have different purposes. These laws weren't binding and controlling, but rather, they were an expression of God's grace. You had a people that desperately wanted to know God, to honour him and to live a life of holiness but how on earth were they going to figure out how to do that? Well God shows them how.

Imagine not giving your children any rules, then just punishing them when they broke one that they were unaware of? It would be very difficult for your children to honour you and live in a way that pleased you wouldn't it?

So in order to produce the people that God desired, he establishes laws that fall into 3 categories. We have judicial / civil law, ceremonial law, and moral law. The bible isn't explicit in what law falls into which category but because we can identify the purpose for each type, we are then able to establish God's heart behind each one.

CEREMONIAL LAWS:

These literally translate to mean 'Custom of the nation'. Given to Moses. The law was not given to Christians but it was given to Jewish people in the nation of Israel. They had their own culture, their own values, their own way of life and God establishes these laws that speak right into that situation.

This means that all ceremonial laws carry the purpose of producing a nation and a people that God desires.

- They include instructions on regaining right standing with God
eg. Sacrifices, other ceremonies regarding cleanliness
- Remembrances of God's work in Israel
eg. Feasts and festivals
- Regulations to distinguish Israelites from their pagan neighbours
eg. Dietary & clothing restrictions.

REMEMBER: God wanted the nation of Israel to be set apart. His prized possession, a royal priesthood.

- Signs that point towards the coming Messiah
eg. The Sabbath, circumcision, Passover, redemption of firstborn

Galatians 3:23-25 ²³ Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed. ²⁴ Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. ²⁵ And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.

Ceremonial law was for a particular people, at a particular time, with one of its main purposes being to foreshadow the coming of Christ.

- It taught the people about the need for blood sacrifice and atonement
- They foreshadowed the coming of Christ in that they pointed towards the 'Lamb of God' who would take away the sins of the world.
- Animal sacrifices were just a symbol of the salvation that Christ would provide.

Paul distinguishes a difference between those aspects of God's law that would be set aside at the coming of Christ, and those aspects that would remain timeless. He is telling us that because of Christ, we are no longer bound by the ceremonial laws, but that this does not release us to be free to sin as we please.

Galatians 5:2 Listen! I, Paul, tell you this: If you are counting on circumcision to make you right with God, then Christ will be of no benefit to you.

Romans 6:1-2 Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? ² Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?

Romans 6:15 Well then, since God's grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not!

Being freed from being under the law doesn't give us freedom to do whatever we want, it gives us freedom to rely on God's grace to make us righteous, rather than our obedience.

There's 613 laws and many of them can be identified as ceremonial laws. They weren't for us, but that doesn't mean they are useless to us. They show us what God was doing to produce a people who loved him dearly, who would be set apart for the call on their life, and for the long term plan of redemption through the blood of his precious son.

You want a better idea on how to love and honour God, on how to become Holy, as God is Holy, look to some of these ceremonial laws but understand that your obedience to them will not, and cannot deliver salvation to your life. We are no longer under this tutor that points to Christ, as Christ has already come and so we are declared righteous as a result of our faith in him.

JUDICIAL / CIVIL LAW

Civil laws were established by God to help govern, to enforce, and to establish the moral laws of God. Moral laws were set to guide people in living a peaceful, and complimentary life to one another. Civil laws not only concerned themselves with moral laws but some ceremonial ones too.

It's one thing to have a law of 'do not murder', but if there is nothing to enforce this and bring punishment for breaking it, then people will cast off restraint.

When we think of 'the law' in NZ, we think of our equivalent of their civil laws. These are in place to create harmony among people, to solidify what God deems as important, and to help aid people in honouring God with their obedience.

Old Testament civil laws include everything from murder, to restitution for a man gored by an Ox, and the responsibility of the man who dug a pit to rescue his neighbour's trapped donkey.

These were the laws for Israelites and the foreigners in Israel at the time. They were for those people, at that time, and therefore, we are no longer under them because of Christ fulfilling the law and giving us a new way to be made righteous. Faith!

MORAL LAWS

Moral laws relate to justice and judgement and are often translated as 'ordinances'. They are based on God's Holy nature which means they are Holy, just, and unchanging. Because God is never changing, he is the same yesterday, today, and forever more, we can know that these moral laws are also unchanging and timeless.

They are an expression of who God is and because he won't change, you can be confident that they apply as much today as they did when God first gave them. Moral laws are very easy to identify because firstly, they are of a moral nature, but secondly, they are considered obvious by reason and common sense.

The difference between moral law and ceremonial law is that we instinctively know right from wrong, as it is written on our hearts. With ceremonial law, you would not know you were breaking it if God had not specifically stated them. Moral law is within you before you've even heard it spoken.

Moral laws include regulations on justice, respect, and sexual conduct. They also include the 10 commandments given to Moses with the exception of the Sabbath. We'll touch on that a little later.

Moral law does not point people towards Christ. It simply illuminates the fallen state of mankind. They highlights our sinfulness when we break them but it in no way points towards a solution of forgiveness.

This is where it gets a little tricky. Because Jesus came to fulfil the law, not abolish it, we are not ACTUALLY bound by these moral laws, YET TO BREAK THEM WOULD STILL BE SIN.

JESUS FULFILLING

There is a common misconception that the Old Testament is an outdated agreement that was replaced by the New Testament one. Now although the bible does identify one as old and one as new, the new does not override the old.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:17 *Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose.*

Their purpose was to reveal to people that they needed a saviour and that this saviour / messiah would die for substitutionary atonement.

Matthew 22:34-40 ³⁴ *But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees with his reply, they met together to question him again.* ³⁵ *One of them, an expert in religious law, tried to trap him with this question:* ³⁶ *“Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?”* ³⁷ *Jesus replied, “You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.”* ³⁸ *This is the first and greatest commandment.* ³⁹ *A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’* ⁴⁰ *The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”*

This is MASSIVE! Jesus is essentially saying ‘You experts are sooooo caught up on every single little law, and you’ve not only become religious about it, but you have lost sight of why the commands of God even exist.’

This is a perfect example of the difference between how girls tell stories, and how guys tell stories.

ADAM:

The other day we went to rainbows end with some friends as we hadn’t gone in a while. We went on the Fear Fall first because we wanted to start with one of the best rides. That was the perfect way to start our day.

DARCIE:

The other day we decided to go to rainbows end because we hadn’t been in a while. I think it was 6 months ago, maybe 7... ummm na probably 6 months ago. We went with Sarah and John, but I think Sarah joined us a little late. So we met at Johns place and drove in around 10am and there was a massive line but luckily it only took us about 20minutes to get through the doors. Once we were in John wanted to go on the bumper boats but I had been telling him the whole time that the first ride we needed to go on was the fear fall because it was apparently the best. So we stood there for about 5 minutes talking about it before we walked about 200m to the fear fall. We were eventually sitting in the ride after taking our phones and wallets out of our pocket and placing them in a grey plastic container. We went up to the top and the view was amazing but I remember freaking out because I didn’t know when we were going to plummet to the ground. We eventually did and I think I yelled 3 quarters of the way down. It was amazing!

When I tell the story, I’m thinking, the point is: We went on the fear fall first. If those listening to our story understand that, then they get what we’re trying to say.

When Jesus talks about the law, he’s thinking ‘if they understand that they are about Loving God and loving our neighbour, then they get what I’m trying to say’. Jesus summarises 613 laws into just 2. Love God, and love people. Jesus is identifying that the whole point of any part of the law is to help us love God better and love our neighbour better.

Because Jesus is the one that many of the ceremonial laws were pointing towards, now that he has come, these laws have served their purpose. It’s not that they are abolished but that Jesus has fulfilled them and made complete what the law was set out to do.

The word 'fulfill' in Matthew 5:17 means to 'fill up', 'make full', 'fill to the full', or 'complete'. Jesus came to magnify, or to fill completely full, the meaning of God's law.

Colossians 2:16-23 ¹⁶ *So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths.* ¹⁷ *For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality.* ¹⁸ *Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. Their sinful minds have made them proud,* ¹⁹ *and they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For he holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it.* ²⁰ *You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as,* ²¹ *"Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!"* ²² *Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them.* ²³ *These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires.*

Paul is talking about the ceremonial laws here.

Jesus summarises all the laws and the commands of the prophets by saying 'the way that you tick all of those boxes, is to tick these two'. If you are loving God, you are obviously not worshiping idols, or bowing down before false gods.

If you are loving your neighbour as yourself, you are obviously not stealing their things, lying to them, or committing adultery with their spouse. Remember that the purpose of the law was to direct people towards living a holy and righteous life, for God's people to be set apart, to prepare the way for the coming of Christ and to enable us to live peaceful, loving lives in harmony with each other.

Jesus didn't replace the old law but he summarised it and established a new way of obeying it. When Jesus came, some people were quick to accept the mercy and grace offered, while others saw this as dangerous. With such grace and mercy, what would stop people from casting off all moral constraint? Paul addresses this in Romans 6. (shall we sin so that grace can abound? Of course not)

The law shows us what God wants (Holiness), and grace gives us the desire and power to be holy. Rather than trusting in the law to save us, we trust in Christ. We are freed from the laws bondage by his 'once and for all' sacrifice.

Our faith in Christ should naturally produce a desire to be Holy.

"Where there is no impulse to be godly, there is no saving faith"

- The law of God is the 'what', the grace of God is the 'how'.
- The law reveals sin, grace forgives sin
- The law demands performance from man, grace offers provision from God.

Galatians 5:1 *So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law.*

After diving into all this scripture and study, I have never been so aware of the magnitude of freedom that Christ brings to our life. But with freedom comes responsibility.

This is not a question of what can I do, and what can't I do? It's not about what used to be considered sin, and what is now considered sin.

It's about God creating people for relationship, establishing law to produce a holy people and preparing the world for the coming of the Messiah. It has always been about Jesus, and it is still all about Jesus.

- **Can you get a tattoo?**

Will it hinder you from loving God wholly, and loving people fully? If so, then you've got your answer. If you idolise it, subtly worship it, or find yourself craving more of it, then perhaps for you, it is sin.

- **Can you wear a garment that has two different threads in it?**

Well considering its ceremonial purpose was to set God's people apart, and you are now set apart by what Christ did on the cross, the double threaded garment command seems to be no longer binding. It already served its purpose.

Romans 6:14 ¹⁴ *Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace.*

Grace doesn't encourage us to forget and cast away God's commandments, but rather it offers forgiveness to us in our broken attempt to live a life that honours God.

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN READING THE LAW:

- 1) Does this law symbolize the separation of Jews and Gentiles in the Old Testament?
- No longer binding
- 2) Does it point forward to Christ's atonement on the cross?
- No longer binding
- 3) Is this law moral in nature, and not 'cancelled' in the New Testament?
- To disobey would be sin