

The Continuation and End of the Mosaic Law

Travis Echols

Summary

My view attempts to be faithful to the Bible verses which suggest a continuation of the Mosaic Law as a unity and at the same time the complete abrogation of the Mosaic Law as a unity. My conclusion is that the Mosaic Law in total is still binding on believers today in a New Covenant sense (i.e., in a more perfect, internalized, deeper, enduring, Spiritual, true [i.e., anti-typological], and life-giving sense as fulfilled by Christ and taught by Him and His apostles to the church). It is also true that the Mosaic Law has been abolished in total in an Old Covenant sense (i.e., in the imperfect, external, fleshly, temporary, anticipatory, typological, and condemning sense as delivered by Moses to the nation of Israel). The Mosaic Law is everlasting in one sense, but temporary in another sense.

The Mosaic Law continues in the better New Covenant sense. The Mosaic Law is abolished in the inferior Old Covenant sense. This is congruent with God's advancing kingdom program from glory to greater glory. Thus, the commands issued to God's New Covenant people in the New Testament constitute law as a guide (rule of life), motivated by love and empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The spirit of the Mosaic Law abides in all its details, being perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ and codified in the New Covenant commands issued by Jesus and the Apostles to the New Covenant church.

Note: The sameness and difference (continuity and discontinuity) in Old Covenant commandments and New Covenant commandments can be illustrated by the sameness and difference of a human being who matures from a child to an adult, or a caterpillar that matures into a butterfly. As the old caterpillar continues in a new and superior form of a butterfly, so does the Old Covenant Law continue in the new and superior form of the commandments of Jesus and the Apostles under the New Covenant.

Thus, a Christian is relieved of the burden of the Mosaic codification of God's Law per se in total as binding ordinance. The Christian is also relieved of cherry-picking Old Testament commandments with no consistent hermeneutic. Yet the Christian is obligated to keep the commandments issued by Jesus and the Apostles which are directed toward New Covenant believers. This obligation is of the nature of a child obeying a Father rather than a condemned sinner before a judge. This obedience commanded of the New Covenant Christian is not burdensome, since it is the natural by-product of faith, love, and gratitude toward God. The Christian is free from legalism and lawlessness. The fact that Christians are issued commandments does not negate or weaken grace or the work of the Holy Spirit. Contrary, the grace of God teaches and enables us to discern and obey God's

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commandments. Similarly, the Holy Spirit Himself is the agent who used human instrumentality to pen the commandments to Christians. The Holy Spirit also illumines and empowers us to know and keep God's commandments in our pursuit of practical righteousness (i.e. conformance to Christ in the way we think, speak, and live). Loving God and loving our neighbor are the two great commandments that endure; yet God provided much-needed instruction, admonishment, reproof, and correction on how that love looks under various circumstances and relationships under both the Old and New Covenants. As would be expected, many commandments are the same in both Testaments (the New Testament repeat many of the Old commandments, albeit without the civil punishments that accompanied their violation); some OT commandments are extended and amplified; some are modified; and some are abrogated. Thankfully, Christians are not left to arbitrarily guess which commandments we are to keep in this age. The commandments issued by Jesus and the Apostles constitute the Law of Christ which incorporate the enduring aspects of the Old Covenant laws in a new and better form-- as is wholly appropriate for a new and better covenant.

Details

The Problem of Mosaic Law in the New Covenant Era: Continued, Ended, or Both?

How does the Old Covenant Mosaic Law apply to New Covenant believers? We are not comparing the quality of the Old and New Testament *scriptures*. All scripture (Old and New) is equally given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness that we might be complete and thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2Tim 3:16; 2Pet 1:19-21; 2Pet 3:16). The Old Testament scriptures were written for our learning and admonition that through the examples of the ancients we might be warned and have hope, patience, and comfort (Romans 15:4, 1Cor 10:11). All the laws of God reflect the holy nature of God. And certain behavior, though not explicitly prohibited in scripture, is prohibited by principle, conscience sake, or love for others. The question asked here is how the Old Covenant laws God gave through Moses at Mount Sinai to the children of Israel apply to Christians today.

Which Old Covenant laws are *binding* on the believer today? Are the Old Covenant laws binding as-is unless explicitly rescinded in the New Testament? Are the Old Covenant laws obsolete unless repeated in the New Testament? Is there a scriptural basis and guideline by which the Old Covenant laws are to be divided--some of which being still binding and

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some not? Is there a different way Old Covenant laws are to be applied to the New Covenant believer, and if so, how is that to be understood?

There are some who think that all of the Old Testament laws are binding on believers unless explicitly repealed in the New Testament.¹ Some believe all Mosaic laws are binding but except the ceremonial rituals/sacrifices (e.g., the moral and judicial/civil laws of Israel should apply today as they were given to Israel). This view is referred to as *Reconstructionism* or *Theonomy*. Some think both the civil and ceremonial laws have been abrogated, but only the moral laws (particularly, the Ten Commandments) are still binding on Christians. Some believe the Old Covenant laws are an indivisible unit that is inseparably linked to the Old Covenant which has been superseded by the New Covenant, thus only the laws issued by Christ and the Apostles establish binding ordinances for New Covenant believers. Still others believe that the Mosaic Law applies to ethnically Jewish Christians only, but not Gentile Christians.

This is an in-house debate among sincere Christians. No orthodox Christian is espousing that sinners are saved by keeping any aspect of the law of God. But rather the disagreement is about how the Old Testament laws apply in 1) the *convicting* work of the Holy Spirit in bringing *unbelievers* to Christ in this age, and 2) the ongoing *sanctifying* work of the Holy Spirit in the *believer's* walk subsequent to receiving imputed righteousness by faith alone without the works of the law. This paper will be focused on 2). To be thorough, scores (if not hundreds) of verses must be studied. So we should be patient with those who are uncommitted or have a different view than ourselves--not so much because this is a secondary topic in importance compared with more fundamental doctrines such as God's and Christ's nature and salvation by grace, etc., but because it takes so much work to study all the relevant verses out. We need to give ourselves plenty of time, read widely, and not rush to conclusions. By prayerfully comparing different views with the scriptures, we can open our minds to new scriptural insights and continual growth in our understanding. What is needed is a prayerful, humble, diligent, and thoughtful approach using sound hermeneutical principles--as opposed to lazy anti-intellectualism, closed-minded dogmatism, or an arbitrary, post-structural relativism (post-structuralism is a 20th century hermeneutical error that focuses on the reader giving the meaning to the text and denies that the author's meaning can be objectively ascertained from the text). This paper attempts to avoid these errors, harmonize the passages involved, move the discussion forward, and stimulate prayerful thinking on this important subject. Exegetical references are not included here; this paper is intended to present a summary position to explain how the relevant verses can be harmonized without exegetical compromise.

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Other works should be considered for help with the extensive exegetical work that logically should precede any summary.

There are verses in the Old Testament that convey the enduring nature of the Mosaic Covenant (Ex 40:15; Lev 24:8; Num 25:13). Albeit many of God's promises were conditional upon his covenant people's faithfulness (Ex 19:5-6; Num 14:30-34; Deut 28:13-25, 45-46, 68; Jer 18:9-10; 1Sam 2:30). But there was also anticipation expressed of God's judgment and subsequent *new-covenant* relationship with Israel (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 11:19-20; 36:24-28).

In the New Testament, there are verses that suggest the Mosaic Law is still binding during the New Covenant era (Matt 5:18-19; Rom 3:31; 7:12; 13:8-10; James 1:25; 1Tim 1:8). However, there are also many verses that suggest the Old Covenant Mosaic Law has been fulfilled and abolished (Matt 5:17; 11:13; Acts 15:5,19, 24, 28; 21:24-25; Rom 6:14; 7:4; Rom 10:4; 14:5-6; 2Cor 3:7-13; Gal 3:2-3; 3:19-26; 4:9-11; Eph 2:15; Col 2:13-17; Heb 7:11-12,18; 8:13; 10:9).

Background Data: The Advancement of the Kingdom through the Covenants

God's *first* covenant was with Abraham and his biological descendants (Gen 12:1-5; 15:18; 17:10, 21). God relayed the covenant promises through Isaac and Jacob (Israel) (Ex 2:24; 6:4; 34:27-28; Lev 26:42). God gave his covenant people Israel his law, made up of numerous ordinances to regulate their lives morally, religiously, and civilly. In time, Israel became a great nation occupying the land that God had promised them. This national covenant involved a promised land, material blessings promised for the land, increase from the land, biological fruitfulness, and tabernacle/temple worship involving a Levite priesthood continually offering animal sacrifices for the sins of themselves and the people of Israel. Within this covenant community, individuals who trusted Jehovah became heirs of *all* the covenant blessings, including personal salvation. But many within the covenant community did not have the faith of Abraham and were not saved (Jer 31:31-34; Matt 8:12; Rom 9:31-10:3). After many years of Israel breaking God's covenant, God promised to make a new covenant with them. This new covenant would not be according to the old covenant made with unbelievers. The people of the New Covenant would not have to teach others "Know the Lord" because all would know Him from the least to the greatest and their sins would be forgiven (Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:6-13). The advent of the New Covenant would also usher in a new age of the Holy Spirit's ministry (Joel 2:28 with Acts 2:27; Jn 14:16; 15:26; 16:7; Acts 1:5). This New Covenant was established by Christ at his

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first coming and is in force today (Luke 22:20; 2Cor 3:6; Heb 9:15; 12:24). With the arrival of the New Covenant, God has made the first covenant old (Heb 8:13; 10:9). There is advancement in redemptive history. The New Covenant is a new and better covenant that cannot be equated with the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision or the related Mosaic covenant of Law because it is the fulfillment/realization/accomplishment of these earlier covenants.

In the Old Testament, God worked through an ethnic *nation* (the Jews) composed of believers and unbelievers (1Kings 19:13-15,18, Mal 3:13-18; Matt 23:29-33; 26:27-28; Rom 11:1-5). In the New Testament, God works through a spiritual organism composed of believing Jews and Gentiles in one body (the church) from *all nations* (Acts 7:38; Eph 1-3; Heb 2:12; 9:15; 11:39-40; 12:23). While it is true that unbelievers and false baptized professors are associated with local or "visible" assemblies, the church as the body of Christ is made up exclusively of true believers (Acts 2:47; 1Cor 1:2; 1Thes 1:1; Heb 12:23; Col 1:24). The current Church period is a progressive fulfillment in God's prophetic timeline. God's redemptive plan started with Abraham and progressed from a man and his children to an entire nation (Israel) under the Old Testament Mosaic Law. Under the New Covenant, believers in Christ from all nations are God's redeemed in the Church. In the future, Jewish and Gentile believers will reign with Christ. In the eternal state, there will be no more sin, all unbelievers will have been consigned to the lake of fire, and the nations, which consist of the redeemed only, will reign with Christ forever.

Proposed Solution of Mosaic Law in the New Covenant Era: Continued in One Sense and Ended in Another Sense

My proposed solution does not divide the Mosaic Law into pieces, by which some portion of the Law applies and other portions do not. This view seems to have very little if any scriptural support. One can acknowledge that the laws can be categorized in various ways, but since none of these categories/divisions are specified in scripture, they are arbitrary and not helpful in resolving this issue. Furthermore, there is positive evidence that the Mosaic Law was an indivisible unity (Matt 5:17-20; James 2:10; Gal 3:10; 5:3). My view attempts to be faithful to the verses which suggest a continuation of the Mosaic Law as a unity and at the same time the complete abrogation of the Mosaic Law as a unity. My conclusion is that the Mosaic Law in total is still binding on believers today in a New Covenant sense (that is in a more perfect, internalized, deeper, enduring, Spiritual, true [i.e., anti-typological], and life-giving sense as fulfilled by Christ and taught by Him and His

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apostles to the church). It is also true that the Mosaic Law has been abolished in total in an Old Covenant sense (that is, in the imperfect, external, fleshly, temporary, anticipatory, typological, and condemning sense as delivered by Moses to the nation of Israel).

The Old Covenant was glorious (Ex 19; 2Cor 3). The Law of Moses supervised God's covenant nation. This Law was holy, righteous and good (Rom 7:7, 12). It advanced God's kingdom. But the Mosaic dispensation was not the final dispensation in God's plan. God had foreordained and promised to Israel a New Covenant to come. In God's kingdom progression, the New Covenant is a better Covenant than the Old (Heb 7:22; 8:6) established upon a better office (Heb 3:1-2), a better ministry (Heb 3:3-6), a better rest (Heb 3:7-19), a better priesthood (Heb 12:7-21), a better high priest (Heb 7:17; 8:1-2), a better sacrifice (Heb 9:13; 10:3-4), a better location (Heb 8:3-5), better promises (Heb 8:6-13), a better sacrifice (Heb 9:9-10:14), a better hope (Heb 7:19), and a greater glory (2Cor 3:6-18). So much more glorious was this New Covenant that the Old Covenant had no glory in comparison (2Cor 3:10).

This change in the Priesthood necessitated a change in the Mosaic Law (Heb 7:12). The ministration of the Levitical priesthood with its ultimately ineffectual sacrifices had to change with the coming of Christ and His fulfillment of all that those sacrifices had foreshadowed. Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The Mosaic Law continues now in a way appropriate for a new and better covenant...

a...as the Law of Christ found in the New Testament to New Covenant believers versus the Law of Moses in the Old Testament to Old Covenant Israelites (Ex 2:24; Lev 26:42; Jer 31:31-34; Jn 1:17; Rom 10:4; Gal 6:2; 2Cor 3; Heb 3:5-6; 10:9, 18)

b...as laws written on the heart versus on stone (Jer 31:33; Eze 11:19-20; 2Cor 3:3; Heb 9:1-15)

c...which fulfilled and accomplished the preparatory types and shadows of the Old Covenant Law (Matt 5:17; 11:13; Gal 3:1-25; Hebrews 7-11; 10:18)

d...which is of the spirit versus the letter of God's law (Matt 5:20-48; Rom 2:29; 7:6; 13:10; 2Cor 3:6; Gal 5:14)

e...which is of the heavenly versus the earthly tabernacle (Heb 8:1-5; 9:23; 12:22-25)

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f...which is of grace and is Spirit-endowed versus supervisory as “under the law” (Joel 2:28 with Acts 2:27; Jn 1:17; 14:16; 15:26; 16:7; Acts 1:5; Gal 3:10-5:18)

g...which is powerful and perfecting versus weak and unprofitable (Gal 4:3-9; Heb 7:18-19; 8:7; 9:9; 10:1-2)

h...which brings liberty versus bondage (Gal 2:4; 4:3-5:1; Col 2:13-17; 1Cor 9:20-22; 2Cor 3:6-17). This liberty allows one to *not observe* or *observe* Mosaic laws and customs in their Old Covenant context as one deems best for love, ministry and/or conscience sake (Acts 15:1-29; 16:3; 18:18; 20:6; 21:15-31; 1Cor 9:20-22) provided the gospel of grace is not hindered (Gal 2:1, etc).

i...which brings life versus death (Rom 3:20; 7:12-16; 1Cor 15:56; 2Cor 3:6-9; Gal 3:21; Heb 7:23-25; 9:1-15; 10:1-20; 13:20-21)

j...which is better and more glorious than the Old Covenant (2Cor 3; Hebrews)

k...which is based on an infallible enduring priesthood (Christ after the order of Melchizedek) versus a fallible temporary priesthood (after the order of Levi/Aaron) (Heb 7-10; 2Cor 3; Gal 3:19)

l...which is based on an effectual once-and-for-all completed sacrifice versus the ultimately ineffectual continual never-completed sacrifices of the Mosaic Law (Heb 9:25-10:1-18)

m...which grants full access to God through Jesus Christ versus limited access to God in the Holy of Holies (Ex 19; Lev 16; Matt 27:51; Heb 4:16; 9:6-10; 10:19-22)

n...which provides forgiveness based on the full and definitive efficacy of the blood of the divine and human Jesus Christ versus the limited efficacy (and ultimate inefficacy) of the blood of bulls and goats (Heb 9-10)

o...which, being so much better than the Old Covenant, brings more severe judgment on those who neglect it (Num 15:24-31; Deut 1:39; Isa 5:1-7; Matt 11:20-22; 25:14-30; Luke 12:10, 35-48; Rom 11:22; Heb 2:3; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:15-25)

References: Stanley N. Gundry, *Five Views on Law and Gospel*; Tom Walls and Fred Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology*; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*; Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*; Commentary by S. Lewis Johnson

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¹ If Old Testament practices are to be continued unless they are individually repealed in the New Testament, a small sample of the many commandments that would still be binding is as follows.

1. To put fringes with blue threads on the borders of clothing (Num. 15:38)
2. To bind God's Word on your head (Deut. 6:8)
3. To bind God's Word on your hand (Deut. 6:8)
4. To write God's words on the door posts and gates of your house (Deut. 6:9)
5. To bless God after meals (Deut. 8:10)
6. Not to reap the entire field (Lev. 19:9; Lev. 23:22)
7. To leave the unreaped corners of the field or orchard for the poor (Lev. 19:9)
8. That a eunuch shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord (Deut. 23:2)
9. That an illegitimate son shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord (Deut. 23:3)
10. That the newly married husband shall be free from war and business for one year to stay home and bring cheer to his wife (Deut. 24:5)
11. That one who defames his wife's honor (by falsely accusing her of not being a virgin before marriage) must live with her all his lifetime. Divorce is not permissible (Deut. 22:19)
12. That a widow whose husband died childless must not be married to anyone but her deceased husband's brother if he will do it (Deut. 25:5)
13. To marry the widow of a brother who has died childless. If he refuses his duty to raise up seed of his brother, the widow must loosen his shoe and spit in his face in the presence of the elders (Deut. 25:5-10)
14. Not to travel on the Sabbath outside the limits of one's place of residence (Ex. 16:29)
15. Not to do work on the Sabbath (Ex. 20:10)
16. Not to sow the field or prune the vineyard in the seventh year (Ex. 23:11; Lev. 25:2)
17. To make a parapet for your roof if you build a new house (Deut. 22:8)
18. Not to shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard (Lev. 19:27)
19. Not to tattoo the body (Lev. 19:28)
20. Not to cross-breed cattle of different species (Lev. 19:19)
21. Not to sow different kinds of seed together in one field (Lev. 19:19)
22. Not to eat the fruit of a tree for three years from the time it was planted (Lev. 19:23)
23. Not to work with beasts of different species, yoked together (Deut. 22:10)
24. Not to wear garments made of different threads such as wool and linen mixed together (Deut. 22:11)