

New Covenant Theology



Questions Raised by New Covenant Theology



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Are the laws and commandments given in the Old Testament binding on New Covenant Christians today?

Are OT Laws Binding on Christians Today?

What we have seen so far:

- The laws given in the Old Testament were designed to regulate the people of Israel living under the Old Covenant.
- The writer of Hebrews tells us that the Old Covenant has now been made obsolete by a superior New Covenant with a new High Priest (Hebrews 8:6-13)
- Consequently, the writer of Hebrews tells us:
 - *When there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.* (Hebrews 7:12)
- Paul tells us in the book of Galatians that the laws given in the Old Testament were put in place only **until** Christ, the promised seed of Abraham, came (Galatians 3:15-25)
- Furthermore, Paul tells us in the book of Ephesians that the Law of Moses served as a barrier between Jews and Gentiles in Old Testament times, but has now been **abolished** by his death on the cross (Ephesians 2:14-16)
- And so Paul can say to the Corinthians that he is no longer under the OT Jewish law, but is now under the law of Christ instead (1Corinthians 9:20-21)

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- Based on these passages, it would appear that the answer to the question, “Are Old Testament Laws binding on Christians today?” would be a resounding “No!”
- And in one sense that is true. ***But*** there are some other things we need to take into consideration.
- From time to time we also see Paul (and other New Testament writers) citing Old Testament Laws as still being applicable to the New Covenant Christians to whom he is writing.
- Why would the New Testament writers cite Old Testament laws in this way if the Old Testament Laws have been abolished and we are no longer bound by them?

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- We have to remember that the purpose of laws in any age, under any covenant, is to define what is holy and righteous and good (Rom 7:12).
- Ultimately it is the character of God that defines what is holy and righteous and good and we, as his image bearers are then called to be holy as He is holy, **regardless** of what covenant we are under:
 - *You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.* (Leviticus 19:2)
 - *It is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”* (1 Peter 1:16)
- The ultimate duty of **all** men in **all** ages is summarized by Jesus when he says:
 - *And [Jesus] said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”* (Matthew 22:37-40)

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- At times, loving God with all your heart will require a specific person or people to obey a specific command that God has given **only** to them:
 - Adam was told not to eat of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:16-17)
 - The Israelites were told to kill every man, woman, and child in the city of Amalek (1 Samuel 15:3)
- But there are other things that are wrong for **all** men in **all** ages because they violate the two great commandments cited by Jesus.
- For example, murder (taking the life of an innocent person) is wrong for all men in all ages because it is unloving towards our neighbor and it is unloving towards God because when we murder, we destroy an image bearer of God:
 - Cain was wrong to murder Abel (Genesis 4:8-15)
 - Noah is told that murder is wrong (Genesis 9:6)
 - The Law of Moses forbids murder (Exodus 20:13)
 - Murder is condemned in the New Covenant (Romans 1:29)

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- Because there are many places where the Old Testament law addresses a moral principle that is still binding on Christians today, the New Testament writers will sometimes cite an Old Testament law when speaking to New Covenant Christians.
- Often, however, in citing the Old Testament law, the New Testament writer will “upgrade” or even modify the Old Testament Law to be more fitting in the New Covenant age.
- We will now give several examples of where New Testament writers do this.

Examples of Where Old Testament Texts Are Cited By New Testament Writers

Example #1:

- **Ephesians 6:1-3 (NIV)** – *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise-- ³ "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.*
- **Compare Exodus 20:12** – *Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*
- Notice Paul upgrades the language to be applicable to all children, not just Jewish children entering the land that God had given to Israel.

Examples of Where Old Testament Texts Are Cited By New Testament Writers

Example #2:

- **Romans 13:9-10** – *For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*
- Paul is not saying here that we are under the Law of Moses – otherwise he would be contradicting what he said earlier in this same letter (see 6:14-15; 7:4; 8:4)!
- Paul is merely pointing out that when we obey Christ’s command to love our neighbor, we “do no wrong” to our neighbor and thereby fulfill the righteousness demanded by the Law.

Examples of Where Old Testament Texts Are Cited By New Testament Writers

Example #3:

- **1Corinthians 14:33b-34** – *As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴ the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says.*
- The principle of women submitting is a timeless principle established by God when he created the first man and woman (cf. 1 Cor. 11:8-9) and therefore is a requirement in the Law of Moses as well as the law of Christ.

Questions?