

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? (Review)

Last week:

- I began by reminding you that the Law of Moses (including The Ten Commandments) was designed to regulate the people of Israel living under the Old Covenant.
- We then briefly reviewed a number of New Testament passages (Hebrews 8:6-13 cf. Hebrews 7:12; Galatians 3:15-25; Ephesians 2:14-16) which teach us that the Law of Moses **ended** with the death of Christ so that we can now say, along with the apostle Paul, that we are no longer under the OT Jewish law, but are now under the law of Christ instead (1Corinthians 9:20-21).
- We then observed that from time to time the Apostle Paul (and other New Testament writers) seem to cite Old Testament Laws as though they are **still applicable** to the New Covenant Christians.
- And so we raised the question: Why would these NT writers teach that us that the Law of Moses has **ended** and no longer applies to us and then turn around and cite OT laws as though they still **do** apply to us?

Are OT Laws Binding on Christians Today? (Review)

Last week:

- Here is how I answered that question:
 - I began by establishing that there are absolute moral principles grounded in the holiness of God Himself which apply to **all** men in **all** ages – we are to be holy as He is holy (Leviticus 19:2 cf. 1 Peter 1:16)
 - I then said that I believe these moral principles are best summarized in what Jesus called the two greatest commandments: to love God and to love our neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40)
 - Because all men in all ages are responsible to obey these moral principles, they are included in **both** the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ.
 - Therefore, it makes sense that when NT writers refer to any of these timeless moral principles in the giving of Christ's Law, they might, on occasion, cite places where those same timeless moral principles are found and explained in the OT.
- And so we then looked at three NT examples where Paul does this: Ephesians 6:1-3; Romans 13:9-10; 1Cor. 14:33-34

Are OT Laws Binding on Christians Today? (Review)

This week:

- As a follow-up to our discussion last week concerning the absolute moral principles that apply to all men in all ages, I would like to take a somewhat in-depth look at a passage where Paul shows that even men who have been given *no* external law are still held accountable to those moral principles.

Then *next* week:

- I would then like to look at a few more NT examples (starting with the second half of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:17-48) where OT laws are cited and then reapplied, sometimes with an upgrade or modification.

The “Law” Written on the Heart (Romans 2:11-16)

God shows no partiality. ¹² For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

The “Law” Written on the Heart (Romans 2:11-16)

- Let’s start by putting this passage in context:
 - The book of Romans was a letter Paul wrote to the Christians living in Rome (Romans 1:7), whom he had plans to visit in the near future (see Romans 1:10-15; 15:19-24).
 - One of Paul’s purposes in writing this letter was to set forth the gospel (i.e. good news) of salvation by faith (Romans 1:16-17).
 - However, before giving the **good** news of salvation, Paul spends most of the first three chapters of Romans (Romans 1:18 – 3:20) giving the **bad** news that all men, Jews and Gentiles alike, are sinners deserving of condemnation at the coming Day of Judgment.
 - The bad news given in Romans 2:11-16 is that even those people who have never heard God’s law, will still be condemned by the inner thoughts of their own hearts on the Day of Judgment!

The “Law” Written on the Heart (Romans 2:11-13)

*God shows no partiality. ¹² For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not the **hearers** of the law who are righteous before God, but the **doers** of the law who will be justified.*

- We see in verse 11 that God as a **just judge**: God is impartial – he doesn’t show favoritism.
- God’s impartiality is demonstrated by the fact that he will condemn **anyone** who sins against Him – whether they be:
 - Gentiles who have **not** had the privilege of hearing his law
 - Or even Jews who **have** had the that privilege of hearing his law.
- Why? Because in order to be saved (i.e. put in right standing with God), it is not enough to **hear** the law. You must **do** everything that the law commands.

The “Law” Written on the Heart (Romans 2:14)

14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.

- So how is it that God can condemn the Gentiles for not doing what the Law says when he’s never given them His law? Is it fair to condemn someone for breaking a rule that they didn’t know about?
- This verse tells us that even though the Gentiles had never had God’s law **proclaimed** to them or **written out** for them (like the Jews had), they show by their behavior that they **do** have a knowledge of God’s moral demands.
- How so?
- There was, in Paul’s day, a “widespread Greek tradition to the effect that all human beings possess an ‘unwritten’ or ‘natural’ law – an innate moral sense of ‘right and wrong.’” (see Douglas Moo’s commentary on Romans, p.150 fn. 34).

The “Law” Written on the Heart (Romans 2:14)

14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.

- We see here that Paul **affirms** this idea (that men have an innate moral sense of right and wrong) when he tells us that Gentiles “*do what the law requires*” through a natural, inborn capacity.
- Or, as the NLT translates this verse: *Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it.*
- *Paul's point is that Gentiles outside of Christ regularly obey their parents refrain from murder and robbery, and so on.* (Doug Moo, p.150)
- And when men recognize and do the things that the law says are right and good, they show that they **do**, in fact, have an innate knowledge of God's righteous requirements.
- Therefore it is **just** for God to hold them accountable when they fail to meet these righteous requirements.

The “Law” Written on the Heart (Romans 2:15-16)

¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

- Verse 15 describes the Gentile’s instinctive knowledge of God’s moral requirements as “*the law is written on their hearts*” [i.e. their innermost thoughts].
- Paul then goes on to tell us **how** that “*law*” operates within their “*heart*” : It operates through their “*conscience*”, so that as they evaluate their own thoughts and behaviors they will often judge their own behavior as:
 - Wrong (and thus will “*accuse*” themselves)
 - Or perhaps right in some cases (and thus will “*even excuse*” themselves in certain situations).
- Paul then tells us that those innermost thoughts, where they **condemn** themselves for **wrong** behavior, will serve as the basis for their condemnation in the Day of Judgment.

The “Law” Written on the Heart (Romans 2:15-16)

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Some points of clarification on this verse:

- Paul is ***not*** claiming here that these Gentiles have ***perfect*** knowledge of God’s Law.
- Our conscience, like everything else, has been corrupted by the Fall, which is why in other passages Paul can say things like :
 - The consciences of unbelievers are “*defiled*” (Titus 1:15)
 - Evil people can eventually destroy their conscience to the point where it becomes “*seared as with a hot iron*” (1 Timothy 4:2 - NIV).
- Paul’s only point in this passage is that people who do wrong know better – even in the absence of law – and that knowledge will be the basis of their condemnation on the Day of Judgment.

The “Law” Written on the Heart (Romans 2:15-16)

¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Some points of clarification on this verse:

- Some have noticed the similarity between:
 - The reference in this verse to “*the law... written on their hearts*”
 - And the prophecy of the New Covenant where the Lord says through Jeremiah, “*I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.*” (Jer. 31:33)”

The “Law” Written on the Heart (Romans 2:15-16)

¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Some points of clarification on this verse:

- Though the wording between the passages may **appear** to be similar, they are referring to two completely different things:
 - The “law written on the heart” referred to by Jeremiah is talking about the work that God the Holy Spirit does (see 2 Corinthians 3:3) as He regenerates the hearts of the New Covenant believers which, according to the prophecy in Jeremiah, results in them becoming God’s people and knowing Him in a saving way (Jeremiah 31:33b-34)
 - In **contrast** to that, “the law written on the heart” in **this** passage (Romans 2:15) refers to the conscience that God puts within man which, apart from the saving work of Christ, will serve as the basis of his condemnation on the Day of Judgment!

The “Law” Written on the Heart (Romans 2:11-16)

- In summary:

- There are a set or moral requirements for which all men will be held accountable – even those who have not been privileged to hear God’s law in some form.
- And where God **does** give us laws, whether in the OT Law of Moses or the NT Law of Christ, we will find that these timeless moral principles are given and explained there.
- Therefore, it can, at times, be helpful to look at both the OT and NT in order to come to a clear understanding of these timeless moral principles.

Questions?