

# New Covenant Theology



# Questions Raised by New Covenant Theology



# Are OT Laws Binding on Christians Today? (Review)

- We are still looking at the first question that I raised concerning New Covenant Theology: Are OT laws binding on Christians today?
- So far we have seen:
  - The NT clearly teaches that the OT Law of Moses **ended** with coming of Christ and, as New Covenant believers, we are no longer under it (Hebrews 8:6-13 cf. Hebrews 7:12; Galatians 3:15-25; Ephesians 2:14-16; 1Corinthians 9:20-21).
  - However, there are a number of timeless moral principles which all men (even those who had no external law given to them) know exist and will someday be held accountable for disobeying (Romans 2:11-16).
  - These timeless moral principles are taught in both the OT and NT, causing a great deal of overlap between the two.
  - As such, NT writers will often cite an OT command where one of these timeless moral principles are given and apply the principle to New Covenant believers – sometimes with an upgrade or change (e.g. Ephesians 6:1-3 cf. Exodus 20:12)

# Are OT Laws Binding on Christians Today? (Review)

- We are now ready to look at a well known passage where Jesus himself:
  - Explains his relationship to the Old Testament Law
  - And tells us how New Covenant believers living in his kingdom are to apply these laws
- The passage we will be looking at is the second half of the “Sermon on the Mount” as it is laid out in Matthew 5:17-48.

# Jesus Applies OT Law to NT Believers (Mat. 5:17-18)

*<sup>17</sup> Do not think that I have come to **abolish** the Law or the Prophets; I have **not** come to abolish them but to **fulfill** them. <sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*

- Jesus says here that his purpose in relation to “*the Law or the Prophets*” (i.e. the OT Scriptures) is:
  - **Not** to “*abolish*” (*kataluo*) – to dissolve, to destroy, demolish, deprive of success, bring them to naught.
  - But to “*fulfill*” (*pleroo*) – to make full, to fill up, to complete, to fill to the top: so that nothing shall be wanting, to make complete in every particular, to bring to realization.
- Jesus tells us in verse 18 that not even the smallest Hebrew markings (“*not an iota, not a dot*”) will disappear from the “*Law*” (in this context “*Law*” is shorthand for the OT Scriptures) until “*all*” that they pointed to is “*accomplished*” (or fulfilled).
- People will often try to use this text to prove that, though we are no longer under the “civil” and “ceremonial” portions of the Law, the “moral law” continues.
- But that’s not what Jesus **says** here! Jesus says that **none** of the OT scriptures are abolished – instead, he says, they are **all** fulfilled in him.



# Jesus Applies OT Law to NT Believers (Mat. 5:19-20)

*<sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

- What does Jesus mean by this? Does he mean that we are to continue keeping all of the Old Testament Laws, including the commands to offer sacrifices, not eat certain foods, etc.?
- I don't think so! If Jesus were saying that, then he would be contradicting many other clear passages in the NT that teach us that these laws no longer apply to New Covenant Christians.
- So what **does** he mean?

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- I believe Jesus means that we are now to “keep” these laws by obeying **him**, because, as verse 17 tells us, these laws pointed to him and he is their **fulfillment**.
- As we look at the remainder of this passage (verses 21-48), we will see that Jesus cites a number of OT commands and, in the course of applying them to us, he makes changes and upgrades to them as he sees fit!
- And in doing this, he is **not abolishing** those laws, but instead he, as the **fulfiller** of those laws, is telling us of a higher standard that those laws **pointed to** – a standard that he now requires in the lives of New Covenant believers.

# Jesus Applies OT Law to NT Believers (Mat. 5:21-48)

- In the remainder of this passage, Jesus will cite six OT commands.
- In each of the six citations Jesus follows the same pattern:
  - He begins by saying: “*You have heard that it was said to those of old...*”
  - Quotes the OT command
  - Then says: “*But I say to you...*” at which point he adds to, upgrades, and, in some cases, even **does away** with the OT command.
- In other words, Jesus takes these six OT commands, reshapes them as he pleases, and then applies them to New Covenant believers.
- But in each case, the standard that Jesus puts forth is:
  - Much **higher** than the standard given in the OT command
  - And fully develops the timeless moral principle that the OT law **pointed** to



# Command #1: You Shall Not Murder (Mat. 5:21-26)

*<sup>21</sup> "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.*

- The command “*You shall not murder*” is a **direct** quotation of the sixth commandment in Exodus 20:13. So presumably, “*those of old*” to whom this was “*said*” were the Israelites at Mount Sinai.
- Under OT law, those who violated such laws were to be “*liable to judgment*” in the courts (Deuteronomy 16:18; 2Chronicles 19:5-6)
- But the root of murder is anger and anger is murderous in principle. We don’t conform to the righteous standard of Christ’s kingdom by merely avoiding murder – we must avoid anger as well.
- The angry person will be subject, not to a human court (which is incapable of judging such inner motives), but to God’s judgment.
- Someone who in anger insults his Christian brother is liable not only to God’s council, but the fires of hell!
- Jewish literature contained much advice against anger, as did many of the Proverbs (14:29; 15:1,18; 19:11 etc.), but Jesus is not just giving advice. He insists that the sixth commandment points prophetically to the New Covenant condemnation of anger and hate.

# Command #1: You Shall Not Murder (Mat. 5:21-26)

*<sup>23</sup> So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup> Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. <sup>26</sup> Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.*

- Jesus uses two illustrations that show the seriousness of anger:
  - The first involves a Christian brother who is angry with us
  - The other involves a case where an accuser is angry with us and is taking us to court.
- We are more likely to remember when **others** do something to make **us** angry than when **we** do something to make **others** angry.
- But Jesus' illustrations show that if we are truly concerned about our anger and hate, we should be no **less** concerned when **we** do something to cause anger in **others**.
- Jesus insists that we take **immediate** action in these cases: anger is so evil and God's judgment of it is so certain that we must do everything in our power to end it **quickly**.

## Command #2: You Shall Not Commit Adultery (Mat. 5:27-30)

*<sup>27</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'<sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

- The command “*You shall not commit adultery*” is a **direct** quotation of the seventh commandment in Exodus 20:14.
- According to D.A. Carson, most Jewish sources view adultery more as theft than impurity (Carson, Commentary on Matthew, p.151)
- Jesus’ treatment of this command is similar to his treatment of the previous command (murder): as ***hate and anger*** are the underlying motivations behind ***murder***, so ***lust*** is the underlying motivation behind ***adultery***.
- There is little, if any, prohibition given in the OT concerning sexual lust – the focus is largely on ***external*** acts of sexual immorality.
- But here Jesus is telling us that the prohibition against adultery points prophetically to the New Covenant condemnation of sexual lust that ***underlies*** the adultery.

## Command #2: You Shall Not Commit Adultery (Mat. 5:27-30)

*<sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.*

- As in the case of anger and hate, the penalty for lust is to be “*thrown into hell*”.
- Given the serious consequences of lust, Jesus calls for ***radical action*** in order to curb it.
- If gouging out your eye or cutting off some other body part is the only way for you to stop lusting, then, Jesus reasons, you’d be better off to go through life without an eye or a hand, than to continue lusting and end up in hell!



## Command #3: Give Her a Certificate of Divorce (Mat. 5:31-32)

*<sup>31</sup> It was also said, “Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.” <sup>32</sup> But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

- The OT text to which Jesus refers here is Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which says that if a man divorces his wife because “he has found some indecency in her”, he must give her a certificate of divorce, and if she becomes another man’s wife and is divorced again, the first man cannot remarry her.
- The double restriction – the certificate and prohibition of remarriage – discouraged hasty divorces.
- Jesus sees the law as pointing to the sanctity of marriage and so he **significantly increases** the restriction on divorce for New Covenant believers by completely **casting aside** the provision for divorce in the Law of Moses and prohibiting **all** divorce, except for the case where a spouse has committed “*sexual immorality*”.
- Jesus then goes **completely** beyond OT law by labeling remarriage after an improper divorce as “*adultery*”.



# Jesus Applies OT Law to NT Believers (Mat. 5:21-48)

- In summary, what we have seen so far is:
  - Jesus tells us that he has not come to set aside the OT scriptures and the commandments contained within them – as though they were of no value or importance.
  - The purpose of the OT scriptures and even the commandments within them was to **point** to Jesus as the one who **fulfills** them.
  - Jesus then, through a series of examples, shows us that we are to “keep” the OT commandments by listening to **him** and doing what **he** says.
  - In doing this we, like Jesus, will fulfill the requirements of the OT scriptures (cf. Romans 13:8-10)

# Questions?

