

**#200 “The Relevance of the Law for Today”**  
**by Brent Barnett**  
[www.relevantbibleteaching.com](http://www.relevantbibleteaching.com)

*“And He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?’ And he answered, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” And He said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE.’”*

*-Luke 10:26-28*

There are some who minimize or ignore the Old Testament as if it is either totally or largely irrelevant for today. Some even refuse to preach out of it at all. Yet Romans 15:4 says, “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” The Old Testament Scriptures, like the New Testament, are given for our hope and encouragement in Christ, that we might learn about God and endure in faithfulness. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” From Genesis to Revelation, we should take note of the entirety of God’s written revelation to us, for we need the whole counsel of God in order to be equipped and adequate for what God would have us be and do. Having said that, there are some laws and practices of the Old Testament that do not translate to today. It is not that we cannot learn from them, for God ordained everything for a purpose. But we need to be careful in our study of Scripture that we rightly divide the Word of God, drawing appropriate interpretations and applications, especially concerning what is contained in the Old Testament Law.

In Christ, we are free, being no longer under law but under grace (Romans 6:14). This is good because no man could have ever kept the entirety of the Law. Indeed, the purpose of the Law was to show mankind his sin and to point him to Christ. Galatians 3:11, 24 says, “Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, ‘THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’ Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.” The purpose of the Law was to condemn, to shut up under sin (Galatians 3:22). The Law wasn’t given to save but to impose guilt and to convict of sin, pointing us to Jesus Christ, the perfect sacrifice. Hebrews 9:9-10 says, “Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.” The time of reformation came when Christ came and died as a sacrifice for our sins once and for all (1 Peter 3:18). Thus, there is no longer any need for the various regulations and rituals in the Law concerning various washings, offerings, what is clean and unclean, or other aspects of the sacrificial system. We no longer need to kill animals and spread their blood on an altar, nor do we need to offer up tithes and offerings to sustain a priesthood.

Jesus shed His blood once for all, and He is our High Priest (Hebrews 9:11). We no longer need a tabernacle or temple, because Jesus lives in our hearts (1 Corinthians 6:19). Even circumcision, a defining external mark of the Jew, is of no value in the kingdom because the kingdom is concerned about the state of the heart (1 Corinthians 7:19). Thus, we can conclude that, when it comes to the laws in the Old Testament that pertain to ceremonial/religious rituals and practices, these do not apply to the believer today under the New Covenant. Colossians 2:16-17 says, "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." The externalities of the Old Testament Law were a shadow of the better things to come in Christ, and these religious/ceremonial aspects of the Law are now rendered obsolete (Hebrews 8:13).

In addition to Israel's distinctive religious/ceremonial practices, they were also a theocracy, ruled by God Who was their king. That changed with King Saul, but we must remember that many of the commands in the Law were given due to the hardness of the hearts of Israel. Divorce, for example, was permitted not because it was moral but because the people wouldn't have it any other way (Matthew 19:7-9). The Jews had list after list of civil laws. These included things such as letting fields go fallow every seven years for the poor to eat (Exodus 23:11), laws pertaining to charging interest (Deuteronomy 23:19), laws governing military involvement (Deuteronomy 24:5), etc. The civil aspects of the law were for the Jews only in that time and that place. There may be things we can learn from the laws, but we are not bound under them. For example, today, we shouldn't execute a person for adultery (Leviticus 20:10). Jesus explained that even those who lust in their hearts are guilty of adultery (Matthew 5:28). Every man and woman would be dead if we took the Law literally. Indeed, that is the point. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). That is the application of the severity of the Law. We all deserve death, but Christ made it possible to have a free gift of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). The Law is a lead-in to the gospel of grace. That is why it is given. We will never be able to properly read, interpret, and apply the commands of the Law if we believe that we need to keep it in order to gain salvation. We must read it with eyes wide open from the Holy Spirit in our hearts as partakers of the New Covenant.

We can learn a great deal in how to do this based upon how Jesus viewed the Law. In Matthew 5:18-19, He says, "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Jesus didn't want us to throw out all the commands of the Scripture, for it is relevant until heaven and earth pass away. In fact, if we want to be great in the kingdom, we need to keep them and teach them. Jesus is not saying that we need to keep the religious/ceremonial and civil aspects of the Law because, plain and simply, He didn't. Rather, He instituted a new practice of the Lord's Table, symbolizing the New Covenant of grace, and He established a new law that summed up the entirety of the old Law. Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ." The law of Christ is the law of love summed up by

the greatest commandments. Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-40, "And He 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 foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." The entirety of the Old Testament, let alone the Law, is summarized by the commands to love God with all of our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves. If we could do these things on our own apart from Christ, we could fulfill the Law. Of course, only those who know Christ can do this because He, Who alone fulfilled the Law (Romans 8:3-4), can empower us to love as He did (1 John 4:7-8). The key is that Christ did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:12). He draws the attention of us all to the heart of the matter which is the ability to love God and others. The Law points us in the right direction in order to be able to do this (e.g. do not covet, do not make idols, do not steal, etc.), but only through Christ can we actually succeed. The bottom line is that Christ does not view the Law as pointless or utterly irrelevant. Rather, given the proper New Testament understanding of its true message, the Law will help guide us as we seek to rightly love God and others. All Scripture is profitable if we know how to read it and how to apply it.

The tendency of human beings, even believers given that we still battle the flesh, is to try to find technicalities to get around the commands of Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments. The temptation is to confuse freedom from sin with freedom to sin. As Galatians 5:13 says, "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." Rather than camp out as close to the cliff of sin as possible without falling over, we would do well to take a step back and avoid even a hint of immorality. Ephesians 5:3 says, "But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints." This does not mean that we should make up legalistic checklists as to what defines righteousness, let alone think that making such checklists more stringent will make us more holy. Man-made rules of conduct cannot reform our hearts. Rather, grace working through God's Word, including the Law, by the Holy Spirit upon our hearts is our only hope of true and lasting change. Grace alone can empower and enable us to love God with all of our hearts and minds and our neighbors as ourselves.

Too many of the Jewish people today still try to keep the entirety of the Law. They miss the forest for the trees because they miss Jesus and how He desires to write the Law on their hearts, teaching them to love. Even some Gentiles who didn't have access to the religious and ceremonial rites of the Law had the substance of the Law written on their hearts because they purified their hearts before God in faith (Romans 2:14-16). It has always been about the heart, even in the Old Testament (2 Chronicles 16:9). Interestingly, in the millennial kingdom, many of the ceremonial aspects of the Law will be reinstated for the Jews. There will be priests and sacrifices along with a temple (Ezekiel 40-44). This further affirms that these were special things between Israel and God. The difference will be that their hearts will be devoted to God in the millennial period, which is what God has desired of them all along (Hebrews 8:10). As Gentiles who are fortunate to be grafted into the promise of blessing made to Abraham long ago

(Romans 11:19), all that we do should be to exalt and thank Christ for making our salvation possible. We are saved because He has written the Law on our hearts. As 1 John 4:19 says, “We love, because He first loved us.” If we get this right, we get it all right.