

“Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.”

Psalm 119:18

The

Law

of

God.

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Forward

What is the law?

Part of the Jewish law included those laws found in the Old Testament. When Paul says that non-Jews (Gentiles) are no longer bound by these laws, he is not saying that the Old Testament laws do not apply to us today. He is saying certain types of laws may not apply to us.

In the Old Testament there were three categories of laws:

Ceremonial Law

This kind of law relates specifically to Israel's worship (see, for example, Leviticus 1:1-13). Its primary purpose was to point forward to Jesus Christ. Therefore, these laws were no longer necessary after Jesus' death and resurrection. While ceremonial laws no longer bind us, the principles behind them—to worship and love a holy God—still apply. The Jewish Christians often accuse

Civil Law

This type of law dictated Israel's daily living (see Deut. 24:10-11, for example). Because modern society and culture are so radically

Moral law

This sort of law is the direct command of God—for example, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) It requires strict obedience. It reveals the nature and will of God, and it still applies to us today. We are to obey this moral law not to obtain salvation, but to live in ways pleasing to God.

Chapter 1

The laws of God are designed to keep us from harm.

Exodus 15:26

"If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his sight, obeying his commands and laws, then I will not make you suffer the diseases I sent on the Egyptians; for I am the Lord who heals you."

God promised that if the people obeyed him they would be free from the diseases that plagued the Egyptians.

Little did they know that many of the moral laws he later gave them were designed to keep them free from sickness.

For example, following God's law against prostitution would keep them free of venereal disease.

God's laws for us are often designed to keep us from harm. Men and women are complex beings. Our physical, emotional, and spiritual lives are intertwined.

Modern medicine is now acknowledging what these laws assumed. If we want God to care for us, we need to submit to his directions for living.

The purpose of all of God's laws

Exodus 20:1

Then God instructed the people as follows:

Why were the Ten Commandments necessary for God's new nation?

At the foot of Mount Sinai, God showed his people the true function and beauty of his laws.

The commandments were designed to lead Israel to a life of practical holiness.

In them, people could see the nature of God and his plan for how they should live. The commands and guidelines were intended to direct the community to meet the needs of each individual in a loving and responsible manner. By Jesus' time, however, most people looked at the law the wrong way.

They saw it as a means to prosperity in both this world and the next. And they thought that to obey every law was the way to earn God's protection from foreign invasion and natural disaster. Law keeping became an end in itself, not the means to fulfill God's ultimate law of love.

The Israelites had just come from Egypt, a land of many idols and many gods. Because each god represented a different aspect of life, it was common to worship many gods in order to get the maximum number of blessings.

When God told his people to worship and believe in him, that weren't so hard for them—he was just one more god to add to the list. But when he said, “You shall have no other gods before me,” that was difficult for the people to accept. But if they didn't learn that the God who led them out of Egypt was the only true God, they could not be his people—no matter how faithfully they kept the other nine commandments.

Thus, God made this his first commandment and emphasized it more than the others.

Today we can allow many things to become gods to us. Money, fame, work, or pleasure can become gods when we concentrate too much on them for personal identity, meaning, and security.

No one sets out with the intention of worshiping these things. But by the amount of time we devote to them, they can grow into gods that ultimately control our thoughts and energies. Letting God hold the central place in our lives keeps these things from turning into gods.

Case studies used in God's laws.

Exodus 22:1

"A fine must be paid by anyone who steals an ox or sheep and then kills or sells it. For oxen the fine was five oxen replaced for each one stolen. For sheep the fine was four sheep replaced for each one stolen.

These are not a collection of picky laws but are case studies of God's principles in action. God was taking potential situations and showing how his laws would work in the Israelites' everyday lives.

These case studies had several objectives:

- (1) To protect the nation,
- (2) To organize the nation, and
- (3) To focus the nation's attention on God. The laws listed here do not cover every possible situation but give practical examples that make it easier to decide what God wants.

Why the laws of God were unique from other sets of laws.

Exodus 31:18

Then as the Lord finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, written by the finger of God.

The two tablets of the Testimony contained the Ten Commandments. These were not the only code of laws in the ancient world. Other law codes had come into existence when cities or nations decided that there must be standards of judgment, ways to correct specific wrongs. But God's laws for Israel were unique in that: (1) they alleviated the harsh judgments typical of the day; (2) they were egalitarian—the poor and the powerful received the same punishment; (3) they did not separate religious and social law. All law rested on God's authority.

How the laws of God could help people avoid sickness.

Leviticus 14:54-57

"These are the instructions for dealing with the various kinds of contagious skin disease and infectious mildew,

Whether in clothing

In a house,

In a swollen area of skin,

In a skin rash, or

In a shiny patch of skin

These instructions must be followed when dealing with any contagious skin disease or infectious mildew, to determine when something is ceremonially clean or unclean."

The laws of God must we follow Old Testament health and diet restrictions?

Chapter 2

How the laws of God reflects God's generosity.

Leviticus 19:9-10

"When you harvest your crops, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop.

It is the same with your grape crop—do not strip every last bunch of grapes from the vines, and do not pick up the grapes that fall to the ground.

Leave them for the poor and the foreigners who live among you, for I, the Lord, am your God.

This law was a protection for the poor and the alien (foreigner) and a reminder that God owned the land; the people were only caretakers. Laws such as this showed God's generosity and liberality.

As people of God, the Israelites were to reflect his nature and characteristics in their attitudes and actions. Ruth and Naomi were two people who benefited from this merciful law (Ruth 2:2).

God instructed the Hebrews to provide for those in need. He required that the people leave the edges of their fields unharvested, providing food for travelers and the poor. It is easy to ignore the poor or forget about those who have less than we do.

But God desires generosity. In what ways can you leave the "edges of your field" for those in need?

How the laws of God focus not negative.

Leviticus 19:10-35

It is the same with your grape crop—do not strip every last bunch of grapes from the vines, and do not pick up the grapes that fall to the ground. Leave them for the poor and the foreigners who live among you, for I, the Lord, am your God.

"Do not steal.

"Do not cheat one another.

"Do not lie.

"Do not use my name to swear a falsehood and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord.

"Do not cheat or rob anyone.

"Always pay your hired workers promptly.

"Show your fear of God by treating the deaf with respect and by Not taking advantage of the blind. I am the Lord.

"Always judge your neighbors fairly, neither favoring the poor nor Showing deference to the rich.

"Do not spread slanderous gossip among your people.

"Do not try to get ahead at the cost of your neighbor's life,
For I am the Lord.

"Do not nurse hatred in your heart for any of your relatives.

"Confront your neighbors directly so you will not be held guilty
For their crimes.

"Never seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

"You must obey all my laws.

"Do not breed your cattle with other kinds of animals.

Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed.

Do not wear clothing woven from two different kinds of fabric.

"If a man has sexual intercourse with a slave girl who is committed to become someone else's wife, compensation must be paid.

But since she had not been freed at the time, the couple will not be put to death.

The man, however, must bring a ram as a guilt offering and present it to the Lord at the entrance of the Tabernacle.

The priest will then make atonement for him before the Lord with the sacrificial ram of the guilt offering, and the man will be forgiven.

"When you enter the land and plant fruit trees, leave the fruit unharvested for the first three years and consider it forbidden.

In the fourth year the entire crop will be devoted to the Lord as an outburst of praise.

Finally, in the fifth year you may eat the fruit. In this way, its yield will be increased. I, the Lord, am your God.

"Never eat meat that has not been drained of its blood.

"Do not practice fortune-telling or witchcraft.

"Do not trim off the hair on your temples or clip the edges of your beards.

"Never cut your bodies in mourning for the dead or mark your skin with tattoos, for I am the Lord.

"Do not defile your daughter by making her a prostitute, or the land will be filled with promiscuity and detestable wickedness.

"Keep my Sabbath days of rest and show reverence toward my sanctuary, for I am the Lord.

"Do not rely on mediums and psychics, for you will be defiled by them. I, the Lord, am your God.

"Show your fear of God by standing up in the presence of elderly people and showing respect for the aged. I am the Lord.

"Do not exploit the foreigners who live in your land.

They should be treated like everyone else, and you must love them as you love yourself. Remember that you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. I, the Lord, am your God.

"Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight, or volume.

“Do not. . .” Some people think the Bible is nothing but a book of don’ts. But Jesus neatly summarized all these rules when he said to love God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself.

He called these the greatest commandments (or rules) of all (Matthew 22:34-40). By carrying out Jesus' simple commands, we find ourselves following all of God's other laws as well.

People often find it easy to dismiss the opinions of the elderly and avoid taking time to visit with them. But the fact that God commanded the Israelites to honor the elderly shows how seriously we should take the responsibility of respecting those older than we.

Their wisdom gained from experience can save us from many pitfalls.

Leviticus 20:22-23

"You must carefully obey all my laws and regulations; otherwise the land to which I am bringing you will vomit you out.

Do not live by the customs of the people whom I will expel before you. It is because they do these terrible things that I detest them so much.

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Why the laws of God still apply today?

Deut. 4:8

And what great nation has laws and regulations as fair as this body of laws that I am giving you today?

Do the laws God gave to the Israelites still apply to Christians today?

God's laws are designed to guide all people toward life-styles that are healthy, upright, and devoted to God. Their purpose was to point out sin (or potential sin) and show the proper way to deal with that sin.

The Ten Commandments, the heart of God's law, are just as applicable today as God 3,000 years ago because they proclaim a life-style that endorsed them.

They are the perfect expression of who God is and how he wants people to live.

But God gave other laws besides the Ten Commandments. Are these just as important? God never issued a law that didn't have a purpose. However, many of the laws we read in the Pentateuch were directed specifically to people of that time and culture.

Although a specific law may not apply to us, the timeless truth or principle behind the law does still apply.

For example, Christians do not practice animal sacrifice in worship. However, the principles behind the sacrifices—forgiveness for sin and thankfulness to God—still apply.

The sacrifices pointed to the ultimate sacrifice made for us by Jesus Christ.

The New Testament says that with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Old Testament laws were fulfilled.

This means that while the Old Testament laws help us recognize our sins and correct our wrongdoings, it is Jesus Christ who takes our sins away.

Jesus is now our primary example to follow because he alone perfectly obeyed the law and modeled its true intent.

Why the laws of God are to remain unchanged.

Deut. 4:2

Knowing the laws of God gives us fewer excuses for breaking them.

Deut. 4:19

God was not excusing the other nations for their idol worship.

He was simply saying that while judgment might be delayed for other nations, it would be swift and complete for Israel because Israel knew God's laws.

We must remember that idol worship was not just keeping statues around the house—harmless lumps of clay, wood, or iron.

It was the commitment to the other evil qualities, beliefs, and practices the idol represented (such as murder, prostitution, cruelty in war, self-centeredness) or to strengths and attributes of mankind, the animal kingdom, or the orderliness of stars that were revered without reference to God who created them.

Because God had so clearly revealed himself in Israel's history, the Israelites had no excuse for worshiping anyone but the true God.

Breaking the laws of God to meet someone's need.

1 Samuel 21:1

David went to the city of Nob to see Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he saw him. "Why are you alone?" he asked. "Why is no one with you?"

This is the first time Ahimelech is mentioned. Either he was the Ahijah mentioned in 1 Samuel 14:3, 18, or, more likely, he was Ahijah's successor. In either case, Ahimelech had to go against the law to give the consecrated bread to David because the bread was supposed to be given only to the priests (Leviticus 24:5-9).

But Ahimelech put David's need and life ahead of religious ceremony and fed him the consecrated food. This upheld a higher law of love (Leviticus 19:18). Centuries later, Jesus would refer to this incident to show that God's laws should not be applied without compassion.

To do good and to save life is God's greater law (Matthew 12:1-8; Luke 6:1-5).

Solomon didn't take the laws of God seriously.

1 Kings 11:2

The Lord had clearly instructed his people not to intermarry with those nations, because the women they married would lead them to worship their gods.

Yet Solomon insisted on loving them anyway. Although Solomon had clear instructions from God *not* to marry women from foreign nations, he chose to disregard God's commands.

He married not one, but many foreign women, who subsequently led him away from God.

God knows our strengths and weaknesses, and his commands are always for our good.

When people ignore God's commands, negative consequences inevitably result.

It is not enough to know God's Word or even to believe it; we must follow it and apply it to our daily activities and decisions.

Take God's commands seriously. Like Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, we are not as strong as we may think.

Finding freedom within God's boundaries.

Psalm 31:8

You have not handed me over to my enemy
but have set me in a safe place.

In David's day, armies needed large areas of land for their military maneuvers. David praised God for the "spacious place"—the open spaces that gave him the freedom to move within God's boundaries.

If you feel restrained by God's moral boundaries, remember that God has given you much freedom, far more than you need to move within those boundaries.

Use the opportunities he gives you to make proper decisions. Use them wisely and they will lead to victory.

Psalm 119:12-24

Blessed are you, O Lord;
teach me your principles.

I have recited aloud
all the laws you have given us.
I have rejoiced in your decrees
as much as in riches.

I will study your commandments
and reflect on your ways.
I will delight in your principles
and not forget your word.

Be good to your servant,
that I may live and obey your word.
Open my eyes to see
the wonderful truths in your law.

I am but a foreigner here on earth;
I need the guidance of your commands.

Don't hide them from me!
I am overwhelmed continually
with a desire for your laws.

You rebuke those cursed proud ones
who wander from your commands.
Don't let them scorn and insult me,
for I have obeyed your decrees.

Even princes sit and speak against me,
but I will meditate on your principles.
Your decrees please me;
they give me wise advice.

Chapter 3

How Old Testament has been misapplied

Matthew 5:17

"Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to fulfill them.

God's moral and ceremonial laws were given to help people love God with all their hearts and minds. Throughout Israel's history, however, these laws had been often misquoted and misapplied. By Jesus' time, religious leaders had turned the laws into a confusing mass of rules.

When Jesus talked about a new way to understand God's law, he was actually trying to bring people back to its *original* purpose. Jesus did not speak against the law itself, but against the abuses and excesses to which it had been subjected. (See John 1:17.)

John 1:17

For the law was given through Moses; God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ.

Putting the laws of God into practice.

Matthew 5:19

So if you break the smallest commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God's laws and teaches them will be great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

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What Jesus meant by “But I tell you”.

Matthew 5:21-22

"You have heard that the Law of Moses says, 'Do not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.'

But I say, if you are angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the high council. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.

When Jesus said, “But I tell you,” he was not doing away with the law or adding his own beliefs. Rather, he was giving a fuller understanding of why God made that law in the first place.

For example, Moses said, “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13);

Jesus taught that we should not even become angry enough to murder, for then we have already committed murder in our heart.

The Pharisees read this law and, not having literally murdered anyone, felt righteous. Yet they were angry enough with Jesus that they would soon plot his death, though they would not do the dirty

work themselves. We miss the intent of God's Word when we read his rules for living without trying to understand why he made them. When do you keep God's rules but close your eyes to his intent?

Killing is a terrible sin, but *anger* is a great sin too because it also violates God's command to love. Anger in this case refers to a seething, brooding bitterness against someone. It is a dangerous emotion that always threatens to leap out of control, leading to violence, emotional hurt, increased mental stress, and spiritual damage.

Anger keeps us from developing a spirit pleasing to God. Have you ever been proud that you didn't strike out and say what was really on your mind? Self-control is good, but Christ wants us to practice thought-control as well. Jesus said that we would be held accountable even for our attitudes.

How religious leaders added to the laws of God.

Matthew 15:1-2

Some Pharisees and teachers of religious law now arrived from Jerusalem to interview Jesus. "Why do your disciples disobey our age-old traditions?" they demanded. "They ignore our tradition of ceremonial hand washing before they eat."

The Pharisees and teachers of the law came from Jerusalem, the center of Jewish authority, to scrutinize Jesus' activities. Over the centuries since the Jews' return from Babylonian captivity, hundreds of religious traditions had been added to God's laws.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law considered them all equally important. Many traditions are not bad in themselves. Certain religious traditions can add richness and meaning to life.

But we must not assume that because our traditions have been practiced for years they should be elevated to a sacred standing. God's principles never change, and his law doesn't need additions. Traditions should help us understand God's laws better, not become laws themselves.

Which ones of the laws of God are more important?

Matthew 22:35-40

One of them, an expert in religious law, tried to trap him with this question: "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?"

Jesus replied, " You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment.

A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

The Pharisees, who had classified over 600 laws, often tried to distinguish the more important from the less important.

So one of them, an "expert in the law," asked Jesus to identify the most important law. Jesus quoted from Deut. 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

By fulfilling these two commands, a person keeps all the others. They summarize the Ten Commandments and the other Old Testament moral laws.

Jesus says that if we truly love God and our neighbor, we will naturally keep the commandments.

This is looking at God's law positively. Rather than worrying about all we should *not* do, we should concentrate on all we *can* do to show our love for God and others.

The religious leaders kept the laws of God for wrong reasons.

Mark 7:1

One day some Pharisees and teachers of religious law arrived from Jerusalem to confront Jesus.

The religious leaders sent some investigators from their headquarters in Jerusalem to check up on Jesus.

The delegation didn't like what they found, however, because Jesus scolded them for keeping the law and the traditions in order to look holy instead of to honor God.

The prophet Isaiah accused the religious leaders of his day of doing the same thing (Isaiah 29:13). Jesus used Isaiah's words to accuse these men.

Jesus fulfilled the laws of God.

Luke 16:16-17

"Until John the Baptist began to preach, the laws of Moses and the messages of the prophets were your guides. But now the Good News of the Kingdom of God is preached, and eager multitudes are forcing their way in.

But that doesn't mean that the law has lost its force in even the smallest point. It is stronger and more permanent than heaven and earth.

John the Baptist's ministry was the dividing line between the Old and New Testaments (John 1:15-18).

With the arrival of Jesus came the realization of all the prophets' hopes. Jesus emphasized that his kingdom fulfilled the law (the Old Testament); it did not cancel it (Matthew 5:17).

His was not a new system but the culmination of the old. The same God who worked through Moses was working through Jesus.

Should Gentiles adhere to Law of Moses?

Acts 15:1

While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the Christians: "Unless you keep the ancient Jewish custom of circumcision taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

The real problem for the Jewish Christians was not whether Gentiles could be saved, but whether Gentiles had to adhere to the laws of Moses. The test of following these laws was circumcision.

The Jewish Christians were worried because soon there would be more Gentile than Jewish Christians.

And they were afraid of weakening moral standards among believers if they did not follow Jewish laws.

Paul, Barnabas, and the other church leaders believed that the Old Testament law was very important, but it was not a prerequisite to salvation. The law cannot save; only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ can a person be saved.

The delegates to the council at Jerusalem came from the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch.

The conversion of Gentiles was raising an urgent question for the early church—do the Gentiles have to adhere to the laws of Moses and other Jewish traditions to be saved?

One group of Jewish Christians insisted that following the law, including submitting to the rite of circumcision, was necessary for salvation.

The Gentiles, however, did not think they needed to become Jewish first in order to become Christians.

So Paul and Barnabas discussed this problem with the leaders of the church. The council upheld the convictions expressed by Paul and Barnabas that following the Jewish laws, including being circumcised was not essential for salvation.

Two ways to think about the laws of God

Acts 21:23-24

"Here's our suggestion. We have four men here who have taken a vow and are preparing to shave their heads.

Go with them to the Temple and join them in the purification ceremony, and pay for them to have their heads shaved.

Then everyone will know that the rumors are all false and that you yourself observe the Jewish laws.

Evidently these four men had made a religious vow. Because Paul was going to participate with them in the vow (apparently he was asked to pay for some of the required expenses), he would need to take part in the purification ceremony for entering the temple (Numbers 6:9-20).

Paul submitted himself to this Jewish custom to keep peace in the Jerusalem church.

Although Paul was a man of strong convictions, he was willing to compromise on non-essential points, becoming all things to all people so that he might save some (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Often a church is split over disagreements about minor issues or traditions. Like Paul, we should remain firm on Christian essentials but flexible on non-essentials.

Of course, no one should violate his or her true convictions, but sometimes we need to exercise the gift of mutual submission for the sake of the gospel.

There are two ways to think of the Jewish laws. Paul rejected one way and accepted the other.

- (1) Paul rejected the idea that the Old Testament laws bring salvation to those who keep them. Our salvation is freely given by God's gracious act. We receive salvation through faith. The laws are of no value for salvation except to show us our sin.
- (2) Paul accepted the view that the Old Testament laws prepare us for and teach us about the coming of Jesus Christ. Christ fulfilled the law and released us from its burden of guilt.

But the law still teaches us many valuable principles and gives us guidelines for grateful living. Paul was not observing the laws in order to be saved. He was simply keeping the laws as custom to avoid offending those he wished to reach with the gospel.

Can we sin if we're no longer bound to the law?

Romans 6:14-15

Sin is no longer your master, for you are no longer subject to the law, which enslaves you to sin. Instead, you are free by God's grace. So since God's grace has set us free from the law, does this mean we can go on sinning? Of course not!

If we're no longer under the law but under grace, are we now free to sin and disregard the Ten Commandments? Paul says, "By no means." When we were under the law, sin was our master—the law does not justify us or help us overcome sin. But now that we are bound to Christ, he is our Master, and he gives us power to do good rather than evil.

Chapter 4

What the laws of God are for.

Romans 7:9-11

I felt fine when I did not understand what the law demanded. But when I learned the truth, I realized I had broken the law and was a sinner, doomed to die.

So the good law, which was supposed to show me the way of life, instead gave me the death penalty. Sin took advantage of the law and fooled me; it took the good law and used it to make me guilty of death.

Where there is no law, there is no sin, because people cannot know that their actions are sinful unless a law forbids those actions. God's law makes people realize that they are sinners doomed to die, yet it offers no help.

Sin is real, and it is dangerous. Imagine a sunny day at the beach. You plunge into the surf; then you notice a sign on the pier: "No swimming. Sharks in water." Your day is ruined.

Is it the sign's fault? Are you angry with the people who put it up? The law is like the sign. It is essential, and we are grateful for it—but it doesn't get rid of the sharks.

Sin deceives people by misusing the law. The law was holy, expressing God's nature and will for people. In the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), the serpent deceived Eve by taking her focus off the freedom she had and putting it on the one restriction God had made.

Ever since then, we have all been rebels. Sin looks good to us precisely because God has said it is wrong. Instead of paying attention to his warnings, we use them as a “to do” list.

When we are tempted to rebel, we need to look at the law from a wider perspective—in the light of God’s grace and mercy. If we focus on his great love for us, we will understand that he only restricts us from actions and attitudes that ultimately will harm us.

Why we should still obey the laws of God.

Galatians 2:15-16

You and I are Jews by birth, not 'sinners' like the Gentiles. And yet we Jewish Christians know that we become right with God, not by doing what the law commands, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

So we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be accepted by God because of our faith in Christ—and not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be saved by obeying the law."

Why faith is superior to the laws of God.

Galatians 3:19-20

Well then, why was the law given? It was given to show people how guilty they are.

But this system of law was to last only until the coming of the child to whom God's promise was made.

And there is this further difference. God gave his laws to angels to give to Moses, who was the mediator between God and the people.

Now a mediator is needed if two people enter into an agreement, but God acted on his own when he made his promise to Abraham.

Being slaves to the laws of God

Galatians 4:3-7

And that's the way it was with us before Christ came. We were slaves to the spiritual powers of this world. But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law.

God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. [6] And because you Gentiles have become his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, and now you can call God your dear Father.

Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, everything he has belongs to you.

The “basic principles of the world” are the elementary stages of religious practice, whether in the Jewish or pagan religion.

Paul uses the illustration of slavery to show that before Christ came and died for sins, people were in bondage to the law. Thinking they could be saved by it, they became enslaved to trying—and failing—to keep it. But we who were once slaves are now God’s very own children who have an intimate relationship with him.

Because of Christ, there is no reason to be afraid of God. We can come boldly into his presence, knowing that he will welcome us as his family members.

“When the time had fully come,” God sent Jesus to earth to die for our sins. For centuries the Jews had been wondering when their Messiah would come—but God’s timing was perfect.

We may sometimes wonder if God will ever respond to our prayers. But we must never doubt him or give up hope. At the right time he will respond. Are you waiting for God’s timing? Trust his judgment and trust that he has your best interests in mind.

Jesus was born of a woman—he was human. He was born as a Jew—he was subject to God’s law and fulfilled it perfectly.

Thus Jesus was the perfect sacrifice because, although he was fully human, he never sinned. His death bought freedom for us who were enslaved to sin so that we could be adopted into God’s family.

Under Roman law, an adopted child was guaranteed all legal rights to his father’s property, even if he was formerly a slave.

He was not a second-class son; he was equal to all other sons, biological or adopted, in his father’s family. *Abba* is an Aramaic word for father. It was used by Christ in his prayer in Mark 14:36.

As adopted children of God, we share with Jesus all rights to God’s resources. As God’s heirs, we can claim what he has provided for us—our full identity as his children (see Romans 8:15-17).

Chapter 5

Obedience

Deut. 8:1 tells us to obey God's commandments. We do this by obeying God with...

OUR HEART

By loving him more than any relationship, activity, achievement, or possession.

OUR WILL

By committing ourselves completely to him.

OUR MIND

By seeking to know him and his Word, so his principles and values form the foundation of all we think and do.

OUR BODY

By recognizing that our strengths, talents, and sexuality are given to us by God to be used for pleasure and fulfillment according to his rules, not ours.

OUR FINANCES

By deciding that all of the resources we have ultimately come from God, and that we are to be managers of them and not owners

OUR FUTURE

By deciding to make service to God and man the main purpose of our life's work.

It is too easy to overlook how much mercy was written into the Old Testament laws.

Above are several examples. What God designed as a system of justice with mercy had been distorted over the years into a license for revenge.

It was this misapplication of the law that Jesus attacked.