Which Law Does the Christian Obey?

by

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"Law" Refers to Old Testament Rules & Regulations

First, let's make clear that in the New Testament the term "law" almost always refers to the Old Testament law – that given by Moses. It was the only religious "law" known to the Jews of that time; other law would be the secular law of the Romans who ruled the Jews at the time of Christ.

To Whom Did the Old Testament Law Apply?

Deuteronomy is a good source of information about the commands of God given through Moses – the law to the Jews – and insight about the persons to whom this law was to apply. Moses addressed the children of Israel prior to giving the law. Look carefully at his language:[1]

> "Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you."[2]
>
> "These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life."[3]

Who was Moses talking to? It was Israel. Over and over he repeated that this was for "you" – Israel. Then he added children, grandchildren and future generations of Israel who would benefit from this personal relationship with God and who would enjoy his blessings by keeping his law.

Did God tell Israel to convert their Gentile neighbors and teach them the law he was giving them? No. He commanded Israel to kill the Gentiles in the land of Canaan, leaving none alive so that they would not contaminate the people with their idolatry.[4]

The commands were for Israel of that day and included future generations. God commanded:

> "These commandments I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, and when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."[5]

These commands were personal to Israel and its progeny. Each generation was to teach these commands to its children.

With the commands, God set before them both blessings and curses:

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[1] All scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by Permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved. The "NIV" and "NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION" trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society.

All emphasis within verses, i.e. underline, italics, and/or bold print have been added for emphasis by the author and do not appear in the original text of Scripture.

[2] Deuteronomy 4:1-2.

[3] Deuteronomy 6:1-2.

[4] "You must destroy all the peoples the Lord your God gives over to you. Do not look on them with pity and do not serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you" (Deuteronomy 7:16).

[5] Deuteronomy 6:4-8.

> "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse – the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known."[6]

The law, the commands, the relationship with God, the blessings and the curses were all directed to the people of Israel and their succeeding generations.

The aliens living in the land were given special attention by God, who commanded Israel to love the aliens because they themselves were aliens in Egypt.[7] *But the alien was not subject to the laws God gave Israel.* When God commanded the children of Israel not to eat anything they find already dead he said, "You may give it to an alien living in any of your towns, and he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner. But you are a people holy to the Lord your God."[8]

We may justly conclude that the Law was given to Israel; they were to obey the law. They were not commanded to go and teach the Gentiles to obey the Law (except those Gentiles that converted to Judaism before the coming of Jesus). The law was intended for the nation of Israel.

Example of Circumcision

The example of circumcision is particularly apt because the command to be circumcised by God preceded the nation of Israel. This was a command given to Abraham by God as part of his covenant with Abraham and his descendants. Let's look at the text:

> Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come . . . Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."[9]

Now combine that with Paul's teaching to the Galatians: "Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'"[10]

Casually reading that passage could lead a person to believe that any male who is a descendant of Abraham should be circumcised, even to this day. Even Gentile believers are considered "children of Abraham" as Paul told the Galatians. It must follow then that even Gentile believers must be circumcised. Wrong!

Paul taught the Corinthians, "Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should *not* be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts."[11] He was harsh when he rebuked the Galatians:

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[6] Deuteronomy 11:26-28.
[7] Deuteronomy 10:19.
[8] Deuteronomy 14:21.
[9] Genesis 17:9-12, 14.
[10] Galatians 3:7-9.
[11] 1 Corinthians 7:18-19.

> "I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all . . . For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."[12]

Did Paul get off the track? God specifically told Abraham that both he and all his descendants were to be circumcised. We read too casually. The sign of circumcision was *a sign of the covenant* between God and Abraham and Abraham's descendants. It was *not* a sign of a covenant between God and those who would believe in Christ Jesus as their Lord.

Jesus Fulfilled the Law of Moses

Jesus said he did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; "I have not come to abolish them *but to fulfill them.*"[13] He also said, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."[14] ("Accomplished" can be read "fulfilled.") Note the major clarification of his first statement about abolishing and fulfilling the Law. Nothing will disappear from the Law until everything has been fulfilled.

It can be argued that everything was fulfilled just before Jesus' death on the cross when he uttered his last words, "It is finished!"[15] Jesus had fulfilled his redemptive purpose as God's sacrificial lamb. He had become God's sacrifice for sin.

Paul told the Romans that "Christ is the *end of the law* . . ."[16] The footnote in the NIV Study Bible points out that the word "end" (*telos*) can mean either (1) "termination," "cessation," or (2) "goal," "culmination," or "fulfillment" and suggests it is better to understand it in its latter sense, as fulfillment of the law.

The Amplified Bible states:

> "For Christ is the *end of the Law* – the limit at which it ceases to be, for the Law leads up to Him Who is the fulfillment of its types, *and in Him the purpose which it was designed to accomplish is fulfilled*. – That is, the purpose of the Law is fulfilled in Him – as the means of righteousness (right relationship to God) for everyone who trusts in *and* adheres to *and* relies on him."[17]

The Old Testament Law was fulfilled and it Christ it ceases to be. It does not govern the life of the New Testament believer. Paul insisted, ". . . you are not under law . . ."[18] Perhaps the best understanding is that Christ Jesus is both the cessation and the fulfillment of the Law.

Jesus Abolished the Law

As further corroboration that we – New Testament believers – are not under the law, Paul said that Jesus abolished the law through his sacrifice on the cross:

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[12] Galatians 5:2, 6.
[13] Matthew 5:17.
[14] Matthew 5:18.
[15] John 19:30.
[16] Romans 10:4.
[17] Romans 10:4, Amplified Bible.
[18] Romans 6:14.

> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh **the law** with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.[19]

We now see the law as both fulfilled and abolished. While Jesus came to fulfill the law, when he fulfilled it he also abolished it so that all believers can be one in him, and not under the yoke of the Old Testament Law.

Some say that it is only the regulations that were abolished. The scripture clearly says "the commandments and regulations."

Sabbatarians often argue that the ten commandments were not included. They often call the Ten Commandments the moral law (even though the 4th commandment has no moral context). Consider what the following scripture describes:

> He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. [7] Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone. . . . [20]

We know the Ten Commands were given to Moses on tablets of stone. No other law was engraved by God on stone. The above scripture must refer to the Ten Commandments. Paul is speaking of it as the same Law that has passed away, but this time is referring to is as "the ministry that brought death." It seems totally justified, then, to say that the Ten Commandments are part of the "Law" to which Paul repeatedly refers. But as we have seen, and will see repeatedly, for the follower of Christ the Law is gone – he abolished the law in his flesh.

Old Testament Has Value to New Testament Believers in Christ

Just because the Christian is not under Old Testament Law does not mean there is no value to the believer in understanding the Old Testament. There are many reasons the Old Testament is worthy of study.

First and foremost, Jesus Christ is in the Old Testament concealed and in the New Testament revealed.[21] There are literally hundreds of prophecies of the Christ in the Old Testament. It is the fulfillment by Jesus of the law and the prophets that provide the most compelling reason for following Jesus. Only one person, ever, has fulfilled the prophecies of the coming Jewish Messiah. Jesus fulfilled all of them, except those yet to be fulfilled.

Second, the Old Testament tells us a great deal about God. It recites his attributes, his power, authority, and tells us his names. We learn his awesome power, his creation of the universe, his concern for the details of his creation and how he honors those who reverence his name, trust him, worship, love

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[19] Ephesians 2:14-16.
[20] 2 Corinthians 3:6.

[21] From Bible teacher Chuck Missler.

and obey him. Because God does not change, these truths are as applicable to us as when they were written.[22]

Third, the Old Testament shows how God deals with his people, how he will punish and discipline them when they desert him to follow other gods, how he will bless, protect, and fight for them when they remain true to him and trust him as their God. In Hebrews the author described the unbelief and disobedience of the children of Israel after leaving Egypt; God prevented them from entering his rest – the promised land of Canaan. The author exhorted, "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their *example* of disobedience."[23] Peter explained why we were told the Old Testament story of Sodom and Gomorrah: "He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an *example* of what is going to happen to the ungodly."[24]

Fourth, the Old Testament gives personal testimonies about men to inspire us in our walk with the Lord. We learn of such people as Enoch who had an intimate relationship with God. One day went to be with the Lord; he did not taste death. We are given the model of perseverance in Noah who built the ark as commanded by God over a period of 120 years. Though likely ridiculed by the evil generation in which he lived, he persevered and saved his family from the flood. Joseph remained true to God and became second in authority in Egypt; God used him to save his family and all Egypt from famine. Daniel revered and obeyed God all his life; he was delivered from the lion's den and used mightily by God in successive kingdoms. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego show us how to stand for God in the face of the highest earthly authority. God demonstrated his mighty power to deliver his faithful from a fiery furnace. Many other testimonies of both faithful and unfaithful men and women help teach us how to live in obedience to the teachings and commands of our Lord Jesus.

Galatians – A New Testament Example Not to Follow

The Galatians had been converted by Paul. The Holy Spirit worked signs and wonders among them.[25] They started out believing the true gospel.

But Judaizers came among them – likely from Jerusalem – who taught the Galatians they also had to observe the Jewish customs and regulations.

Paul Condemned The Judaizers

The Judaizers were Jews who claimed to be Christians but they demanded that Gentile Christians observe the Jewish law – the Old Testament law, including circumcision. Was this a mild difference in doctrine? Was it just a difference of opinion, neither right or wrong? No.

Paul could hardly have condemned it more forcefully calling it "a different gospel – which is *really no gospel at all*."[26] He condemned those who brought that false gospel saying, "If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, *let him be eternally condemned*!"[27]

By Law or By Faith?

The issue is righteousness – right standing with God. Is one righteous before God by observing the law? Or is righteousness by faith? Paul answered these questions:

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[22] Hebrews 13:8.
[23] Hebrews 4:11.
[24] 2 Peter 2:6.
[25] Galatians 3:5.
[26] Galatians 1:6-7.
[27] Galatians 1:9.

> *All who rely on observing the law are under a curse*, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."[28] Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because "The righteous will live by faith."[29] *The law is not based on faith*; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."[30] Christ redeemed us from the *curse of the law. . .*"[31]
>
> Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.
>
> Before this faith came, we were *held prisoners by the law*, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are *no longer under the supervision of the law.*[32]

Paul's condemnation remains today for anyone who would add to the finished work of Christ by claiming that in order to be justified Christians must obey Old Testament law.

Though Paul clearly states that God justifies those who have faith in Jesus,[33] John seems to add a new qualification: "*If we walk in the light*, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and *the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin*."[34] John appears to be saying we can be justified by our obedience (by walking in the light).

These two statements are easily harmonized, remembering again Paul's injunction to the Romans: Obedience comes *from* faith![35] Justification is by faith but saving faith is evidenced by obedience – by walking in the light. Justification and salvation are not through obedience, but through faith which is made evident by obedience to the teachings and commands of Jesus.

Galatians Had Compromised Their Salvation

This issue was not a casual matter, a mere difference of opinion between believers. He asked the Galatians, "How is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles (that you had before)? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?"[36]

Paul saw they were observing special days and months and seasons and years, just as the Jews continued to do under their regulations and the law. He said, "I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you . . . I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you . . ."[37]

Lest you doubt that Paul was concerned that they had abandoned the true gospel and their salvation, Paul reinforced the message:

> "I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. . . . You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.[38]

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[28] Paul quoted Deuteronomy 27:26.
[29] Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4.
[30] Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5.
[31] Galatians 3:10-13.
[32] Galatians 3:22-25.
[33] Romans 3:26.
[34] 1 John 1:7.
[35] Romans 1:5.
[36] Galatians 4:9.
[37] Galatians 4:11, 19.
[38] Galatians 5:2,4.

Paul assured them, "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law."[39] We know if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. . . . Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.[40]

A New Covenant

Jesus Christ brought a *new covenant*; the old covenant was done away with. "Christ is the mediator of a *new covenant*, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. . ."[41] Circumcision, the sign of the old covenant is no longer applicable; it is not a sign of the new covenant. Even worse, Paul taught that to go back under the law to require circumcision meant they were giving up their relationship to Jesus Christ – Christ would be of no value to them at all. They were admitting their belief that Jesus' sacrifice was not sufficient – that more was required.

Long before Christ came, God caused Jeremiah to prophesy, "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will *not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers* when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord."[42]

At the last Passover observance with his disciples, Jesus took the cup (after supper),[43] saying, "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood*, which is poured out for you."[44] The sign of the new covenant is not circumcision, as with the Old Testament Law, but rather what Christians call the Lord's Supper – partaking of bread and wine (or wine substitute) commemorating Christ's broken body and shed blood for the remission of sins, once for all.[45]

Change of Priesthood

Not only was there a change of covenant, as we've already seen, there was a change of priesthood. God declared of Jesus: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."[46] Speaking first of the old law and then of the priesthood of Jesus, the author continued:

> The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced by which we draw near to God.
>
> And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, but he (Jesus) became a priest with an oath when God said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'"
>
> Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.[47]

Through Jesus God made everything new. Jesus – the new high priest in the order of Melchizedek – guaranteed a new covenant. Not only is it new, it is superior:

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[39] Galatians 5:18.
[40] Romans 8:9, 14.
[41] Hebrews 9:15.
[42] Hebrews 8:8-9, quoting Jeremiah 31:31-32.
[43] The cup of atonement.
[44] Luke 22:20.
[45] Hebrews 9:26,28; 10:10; 1 Peter 3:18.
[46] Hebrews 7:17, quoting Psalm 110:4.
[47] Hebrews 7:18-22.

> But the ministry (priesthood) Jesus has received is as *superior* to theirs (Levitical priesthood) as the covenant of which he is mediator is *superior* to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.[48]

If the covenant changed and the priesthood changed, did God change anything else?

Change of Law

"For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a *change of the law*."[49] Scripture states that the Old Testament Law was not sufficient, that there is now a new law.

Paul told the Romans that "*Christ is the end of the law* so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."[50]

The Law of Christ

Paul called the new law "the law of Christ."[51] It is that body of commands and teachings which Jesus commanded be taught to every new disciple, "Teach them to obey all that I have commanded you."[52]

Paul equated God's law with Christ's law:

> To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.[53]

Paul instructed the Galatians: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."[54] Paul said, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God"[55] The continuous emphasis of the New Testament is on what Jesus commanded, on what Jesus said!

True Believers Will Obey

Jesus did not merely suggest that believers should obey him. He stated as fact that true believers – those who love him – will obey him. He said, "If you love me, you *will obey* what I command."[56]

Peter added that believers were chosen to obey. He greeted his readers by calling them God's elect, "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood."[57]

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[48] Hebrews 8:6.
[49] Hebrews 7:12.
[50] Romans 10:4.
[51] Galatians 6:2.
[52] Matthew 28:20.
[53] 1 Corinthians 9:21.
[54] Galatians 6:2
[55] Colossians 3:16.
[56] John 14:15.
[57] 1 Peter 1:2.

The "Law of Christ" is the Expressed Will of God

Even today there are those who claim the Christian is to obey many of the laws and regulations of the Old Testament. But as we have already seen, that law was given under the old covenant.

The law of Christ – the teachings and commands of Jesus – is found in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the New Testament.

Jesus warned, "Not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of heaven but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."[58] Jesus did not say that only those who obeyed his teachings and commands would enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of the Father. Should we seek to learn what the will of the Father is and obey it? Yes, of course. Should we also obey the teachings and commands of Jesus? Yes, we should.

The Christian is not to learn and obey two sets of commands. The teachings and commands of Jesus are the will of the Father!

Jesus Was Sent By God

Repeatedly Jesus told his audiences that he had come from God, his Father. Jesus told us the source of his authority. "For the one whom God has sent speaks the *words of God*. . . ."[59] He said, "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but *him who sent me*."[60] Speaking of God his Father, Jesus said, "I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and *he sent me*."[61]

Jesus Came To Do the Will of God

Speaking of his purpose Jesus said, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but the will of him who sent me."[62]

"My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but *I do know him and keep his word*."[63]

God Is the Source of Jesus' Teaching

Jesus revealed the source of his teaching and the way to confirm that truth: "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own."[64]

"He who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world."[65]

Jesus Said and Did Only What God Told Him to Do and Say

Jesus specifically stated that what he taught and commanded came from God. "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do *nothing on my own* but *speak just what the Father has taught me*."[66] "I did *not* speak of my own accord, but the

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[58] Matthew 7:21.
[59] John 3:34.
[60] John 5:30.
[61] John 7:28-29.
[62] John 6:38.
[63] John 8:54-55.
[64] John 7:16-17.
[65] John 8:26.
[66] John 8:28.

Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. . . . So *whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say*."[67] "Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are *not* just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work."[68] "These words you hear are *not* my own; *they belong to the Father who sent me*."[69] "The world must learn that I love the Father and that *I do exactly what my Father has commanded me*."[70]

Because God instructed Jesus what to do and say, and because Jesus obeyed perfectly, *whatever Jesus said and did was God's will*. Every teaching, every command, every miracle, all were done by Jesus because God the Father instructed him to do it and he did exactly as he was told. *Everything Jesus did was the will of God*.

The Command to New Disciples: Obey All I Commanded You

Jesus told his followers that only those who *do* the will of the Father will enter the kingdom of heaven. With equal truth he could have said, "Only those who obey my teachings and commands will enter the kingdom of heaven.

Now we know the reason behind his command to the church for new disciples: "*Teach them to obey all that I commanded you*."[71] By doing that we will teach the disciples the will of God. By our obedience to Jesus' command we make available for new disciples all the special blessings for those who obey Jesus' commands.

The Law of Christ Is a Law of the Heart and Mind

The new law given by Jesus under the new covenant is quite different than the Old Testament Law as taught and practiced by the religious leaders in Jesus' day. The law had become legalistic. "Do this" and Don't do that" marked the Jewish religion. There were dozens of regulations about what was permissible on the Sabbath.

Jesus recited incident after incident in which form had taken the place of substance and how the Jews were in error in their thinking.[72] He called the teachers of the law and Pharisees hypocrites![73] "You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside *you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness*."[74]

Jesus turned Jewish thinking on its head by teaching that instead of an "eye for eye and tooth for tooth," his follower was not to resist an evil person. "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."[75] His teaching was radical: "If someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."[76]

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[67] John 12:49-50.
[68] John 14:10.
[69] John 14:24.
[70] John 14:31.
[71] Matthew 28:20.
[72] Matthew 23
[73] Matthew 23:27.
[74] Matthew 23:28.
[75] Matthew 5:38-39.
[76] Matthew 5:40-42.

Jesus did not teach just purity of action but purity of mind. It must have shocked his listeners when he said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."[77]

The Jewish people were taught they were not to break their oaths, particularly their oath to the Lord. Jesus said, "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."[78]

In the past the Jews had been taught to love their neighbors and hate their enemies. Jesus commanded: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."[79]

In a day when burnt offerings were made daily for the sins of the people, Jesus announced, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."[80]

A New, Higher, Spiritual Dimension of Obedience

Through his teachings and commands, Jesus introduced a new level, a new dimension of spiritual walk with God, one in which not just the externals were to be pure but one in which the heart and mind were to be pure.

Unique Relationships & Blessings for Those Who Obey the Law of Christ

Holy Spirit Is Given to Those Who Obey

Jesus said he would ask the Father to give the Holy Spirit to those who obey him.[81]

This fact is corroborated by Peter as he defended the Apostles before the Sanhedrin. Speaking of the Holy Spirit, he said: ". . . the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."[82]

What of those who do not obey, who do not have the Holy Spirit? Paul said, "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."[83] Can anyone have salvation who does not belong to Christ?

Special Love Relationship With God For Those Who Obey

Jesus went on to say, "Whoever has *my commands* and obeys them, he is the one who loves Me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. . . . If anyone loves me he will obey *my teaching*. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."[84]

The reverse was also true. Jesus said, "He who does not love me will not obey *my teaching*."[85]

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[77] Matthew 5:27-28.
[78] Matthew 5:37.
[79] Matthew 5:44.
[80] John 4:23-24.
[81] John 14:16.
[82] Acts 5:32. See also 1 John 3:24.
[83] Romans 8:9.
[84] John 14:21,23.
[85] John 14:24.

Remain in Christ's Love If We Obey

Jesus assured his followers of his love but then made remaining in his love conditional, not unconditional as is often represented. Note the condition: "If you obey *my commands*, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love."[86]

Friends of Jesus If We Obey

Even being a friend of Jesus is conditional upon our obedience. Jesus stated: "You are my friends if you do *what I command*."[87]

Really His Disciples; Know the Truth

Jesus said, "If you hold to *my teaching*, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."[88]

Never See Death

Jesus assured his followers, "If anyone keeps *my word*, he will never see death."[89]

Note that in the blessings recited above, it was obedience to Jesus that caused the blessings – "my word, my teaching, what I command, my commands, my teaching." In the Old Testament the blessings were promised for obedience to the law of Moses.

Obedience Related to Salvation

Upon reading the heading of this section, some may have already jumped to the accusation that I'm about to discuss work-oriented salvation. We must obey to be saved, you are thinking I am about to say. If so, you are partially right, but likely mostly wrong in your conclusion.

Consider the scripture, "He (Jesus) became the source of eternal salvation *for all who obey him*."[90] What was the writer saying? Was he claiming that those who obey Jesus will be saved?

Consider again Jesus' warning, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven."[91] We have seen that everything Jesus said – all his teachings and commands – were the will of God. Thus, to "do" the will of God must mean to obey the teachings and commands of Jesus. It must mean that no one will enter the kingdom of heaven who does not obey them.

Loving God Means To Obey His Commands

Jesus taught that the first and greatest commandment was to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.[92] Jesus is our Lord; our Father is God.[93]

Jesus said: "If you love me, *you will obey me*."[94] This was not stated as an option or a likelihood, e.g. most will obey me or you'll want to obey me. No, if you love me you will obey me. He continued,

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[86] John 15:10.
[87] John 15:14.
[88] John 8:31-32.
[89] John 8:51.
[90] Hebrews 5:9.
[91] Matthew 7:21.
[92] Matthew 22:37.
[93] 1 Corinthians 8:6.

"Whoever *has my commands and obeys them*, he is the one who loves me."[95] Jesus continued, "If anyone loves me, he will *obey my teaching*."[96]

John defined love for God: "This is love for God: to obey his commands."[97] God's commands are the teachings and commands of Jesus. If we love God we will obey his commands.

Conflict Between Believing and Obeying?

Casual reading could lead one to conclude that some Bible texts say salvation may be had through obedience while other texts say salvation is through faith – believing. Is there a conflict?

Of course there isn't. This is another example where a reading of the whole Scripture brings everything into proper context.

Paul answered this issue when he told his mission statement to the Romans: "Through him (Jesus Christ our Lord) and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the *obedience* that *comes from faith*."[98] Paul's statement stands, "We are saved by grace, through *faith . . .*"[99]

Faith must come first. *Obedience is the evidence of the faith*. Jesus said we will obey if we truly have faith.

If one does not obey, Paul exhorts: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test."[100] The Apostle John corroborates Paul, saying: "Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us."[101]

Can we have salvation if we are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit? Paul stated, "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."[102]

Conclusion

Jesus fulfilled completely the Old Testament Law. From that time on, Jesus' teachings and commands superseded the law of Moses and the Old Testament law. His law – called Christ's law – was spiritual, requiring purity of the heart and mind, not merely the observation of rituals required under the Old Testament law. The new law was required under the new covenant which provided for justification by the shed blood of Jesus rather than the blood of animals as required under Old Testament law.

Those who truly have a saving faith in Christ Jesus as their Lord will obey his teachings and commands. Obedience is a necessary and natural evidence of a saving faith. Salvation is at stake, not because one is or can be saved through obedience, but because one who is not obedient displays the lack of a saving faith.

Upon committing to obey the teachings and commands of Jesus, we are given the Holy Spirit who then enables us to obey. John assures us, "His commands are not burdensome."[103] But that is only true

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[94] John 14:15.
[95] John 14:21.
[96] John 14:23.
[97] 1 John 5:3.
[98] Romans 1:5.
[99] Ephesians 2:8
[100] 2 Corinthians 13:5.
[101] 1 John 3:24.
[102] Romans 8:9.
[103] 1 John 5:3.

for someone with a saving faith. Without the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, attempting to obey must be very difficult. Jesus assured us:

> "Take my yoke upon you, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."[104]

Because of our sinful nature and habits of sin even true believers disobey from time to time. The frequency of disobedience becomes less through training[105] as we seek to follow our Master's teaching. We can have our heart and mind committed to obey, even though we do so imperfectly. That is what our Master calls us to.

Jesus never asks us for something we cannot do; he provides the means – through the power of his Spirit – to accomplish all he asks of us. Never seek the worldly excuse that we cannot obey. That would be to call Jesus a liar. Set your will to obey him – to love him – with all your soul, heart and mind. He will supply the power through his Spirit to enable you to do it.

[104] Matthew 11:28-30.
[105] 1 Corinthians 9:25-27, 1 Timothy 4:7-8; 2 Timothy 3:16-17.