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HOW TO UNDERSTAND AND APPLY
THE OLD TESTAMENT



DeRouchie

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this magnificent work." —Eugene H. Merrill

HOW TO UNDERSTAND AND APPLY THE OLD TESTAMENT



TWELVE STEPS FROM EXEGESIS TO THEOLOGY



Jason S. DeRouchie

FOREWORD BY D. A. CARSON

PRP

HOW TO
UNDERSTAND AND APPLY
THE OLD TESTAMENT



TWELVE STEPS FROM EXEGESIS TO THEOLOGY

Jason S. DeRouchie

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Our unchanging Lord is consistent in what he requires, in what he intends, and in the way he uses promises to motivate obedience. Like the nation of Israel, the church is called to follow the instruction of our chief, new covenant Mediator: “Make disciples of all nations, . . . teaching them to obey all that I have commanded” (Matt. 28:20). Also, God uses promises to motivate holiness and to keep us from evil: “He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (2 Peter 1:4). Finally, God’s purpose ever remains that others “may see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

The Christian and Old Testament Law

Establishing the Law’s Relevance for Christians



Paul stressed that “whatever was written in former days was written for *our* instruction” (Rom. 15:4). Similarly, immediately after stressing how the sacred *Jewish* writings “are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus,” he stressed that “all Scripture is . . . profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:15). In the apostle’s mind, we should be able to direct Christians back into a path of godliness from the Old Testament. Yet how do we do this faithfully when we know that so much has changed with the coming of Christ? Before setting out a method for applying Old Testament law Christianly, I want to state and unpack three principles that guide my Christian approach to Old Testament law.

1. Christians are part of the new covenant, not the old.

Jesus said that “all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John [the Baptist],” but since his coming we have moved into the age of fulfillment in which centuries of Old Testament hopes are now being realized (Matt. 11:13; cf. Luke 16:16). The grace of the Mosaic law has now been superseded by the grace and truth coming to us through Jesus Christ (John 1:16–17).

As new covenant believers, Christians are not “under [old covenant] law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14–15; cf. 1 Cor. 9:20–21; Gal. 5:18). For Paul, the Mosaic law represented an era of enslavement and death, and the old covenant bore a “ministry of condemnation” in contrast to the new covenant’s “ministry of righteousness” (2 Cor. 3:9). Moses would have fully agreed, because he affirmed both Israel’s innate stubbornness and its

future destruction (Deut. 9:6–7; 31:27–29).⁷ Christians’ “release from the law” (Rom. 7:6) in part means that the Mosaic law is no longer the direct and immediate guide or judge of the conduct of God’s people.⁸ The age of the Mosaic law covenant has come to an end in Christ, so the law itself has ceased having a central and determinative role among God’s people (2 Cor. 3:4–18; Gal. 3:15–4:7).⁹ “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:4). Not one of the 613 stipulations in the Mosaic law covenant, as a written legal code, is directly binding on Christians (cf. Acts 15:10; Gal. 4:5; 5:1–12; Eph. 2:14–16).

The old covenant brought forth an age of death to the majority of the Israelites who retained hard hearts, and the eschatological, new covenant work of Christ transcends and supersedes this law covenant. In Paul’s words, “Before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian” (Gal. 3:23–25). Similarly, the writer of Hebrews said, “Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. . . . In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8:6, 13; cf. 7:12; 10:9). Christians are part of the new covenant, not the old.

2. Christ fulfills the Mosaic law, and we appropriate it only through his fulfillment.

Jesus stressed that he came not “to abolish the Law and the Prophets” but “to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17). By his “*fulfilling*” *the Old Testament*, I believe he meant that he supplies the “eschatological actualization” of all that the Old Testament predicted, whether through direct or typological prophecy or through the overarching salvation-historical trajectory.¹⁰ In other words, Jesus stood as the goal and end of Old Testament hopes and shadows.¹¹ All of us can easily recognize how Christ—being the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45;

7. For more on Moses’ conviction that his ministry was one of condemnation as he awaited a greater prophet who would mediate a better covenant, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “From Condemnation to Righteousness: A Christian Reading of Deuteronomy,” *SBJT* 18, 3 (2014): 87–118.

8. So too Douglas J. Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Wayne G. Strickland, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 343; cf. 375.

9. *Ibid.*, 359.

10. Tom Wells and Fred G. Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2002), 115; cf. 77–159. For an exceptional word study on πληρόω (“to fulfill”), see Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1991), 363–77; cf. 267. For similar approaches to Matthew 5:17–19, see Douglas J. Moo, “Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law,” *JSNT* 7, 20 (1984): 23–28; Moo, “Law,” *DJG* 456–58; Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses,” 347–53; Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, 263–69; D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *Matthew & Mark*, 2nd ed., Expositor’s Bible Commentary 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 172–79.

11. Poythress helpfully writes, “Jesus does not assert merely a static continuation of the force of the law, but rather a dynamic advance—in fact, the definitive fulfillment. What was temporary and shadowy in the form of the Old Testament law is superseded, now that God’s glory and kingly power are being manifested in the very

cf. Rom. 5:14), the representative of Israel (Isa. 49:1–6; Matt. 21:9; Luke 1:32–33), the true Passover Lamb (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7), the true temple (John 2:21), and so on—is the substance of all old covenant shadows (Col. 1:16–17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1). Yet the Mosaic law also anticipated Jesus in the way it identified and multiplied sin (Rom. 3:20; 5:20; cf. 7:7–12; Gal. 3:19), imprisoned the sinful (Rom. 3:19–20; 8:2–3; Gal. 3:10, 13, 22), and by these disclosed everyone’s need for atonement in Christ. The law, in this sense, predicted Christ, who is “the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:4). As Paul states elsewhere: “By works of the law no human being will be justified in [God’s] sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (Rom. 3:20–22).

Every Old Testament ethical ideal pointed ahead to Christ’s perfect righteousness on behalf of his elect (Rom. 5:18–19; 8:3–4; Phil. 2:8), a point that I will take up further in the next unit. Furthermore, Jesus’ role as teacher and covenant Mediator also fulfills Moses’ own eschatological hopes for a “prophet” like him—one who would know God face to face, who would perform great signs and wonders, and to whom people would listen (Deut. 18:15; 34:10–12; cf. Luke 7:16; 9:35; Acts 3:22–26; 7:37).

Significantly, Jesus fulfilled the law in such a way as to maintain the lasting relevance of each part. Christ said, “The Law and the Prophets were until John [the Baptist]; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached . . . But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void” (Luke 16:16–17). In these verses we see both *continuity* (all the Law remains part of Christian Scripture and is therefore instructive) and *discontinuity* (the Old Testament age of prediction has given rise to fulfillment).

A similar tension is present in Matthew 5:17–19, which we will now quote in whole. Here Jesus stresses that all the commanding parts of the Mosaic law are still instructive for his followers, but *only when read in the light of his law-fulfillment*:

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. 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. 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.

By “these commandments,” Jesus most likely refers to the directives and prohibitions of the Mosaic law itself.¹² He thus affirms that the Mosaic law remains a relevant guide for

person of Jesus and in his ministry. The promise of the kingdom of heaven involves the intensification of all that served to manifest God in the Old Testament. All is transformed by the supremacy and weightiness of God Himself coming to save” (*The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, 265).

12. So too Moo, “Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law,” 28; Moo, “Law,” 458; Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses,” 353; Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, 267–69; Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology*, 127; Carson, “Matthew,” 179.

believers, but *only* when we engage it through his law-fulfillment, which could result in the intensifying, transforming, extending, or annulling of any given law. The “law of Christ” that we live out (Isa. 42:4; Matt. 28:20; 1 Cor. 9:21) is the law as fulfilled by Jesus, which is the eschatological realization of the Mosaic law in its original form. Thus, our keeping the law of Christ fulfills Moses’ prediction that in the day when God would circumcise hearts and empower love (Deut. 30:6)—something that we are experiencing today in Christ and the new covenant (Rom. 2:29)—God’s people would heed all the commands Moses gave in *Deuteronomy*: “And you shall turn and heed the voice of the LORD and keep *all his commandments that I command you today*” (Deut. 30:8, author’s translation).

While Christians are not directly legally bound to the Mosaic law, we do not throw out the law itself. Instead, we follow the pattern of the New Testament authors, viewing all the Old Testament laws as profitable and instructive (e.g., Rom. 13:9; 1 Cor. 9:7–9; Eph. 6:1–3; 1 Tim. 5:18; 1 Peter 1:15–16; cf. Rom. 4:23; 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11), yet only through the mediation of Christ. And because Jesus fulfills different laws in different ways, we must consider each law on its own in light of Christ’s work. The end result after doing such work is what Paul terms the “*law of Christ*” (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2).

When Jesus is viewed as the lens for considering the lasting validity of Moses (fig. 12.3), we recognize that some laws come straight through him (e.g., maintain gender distinction and never commit adultery, murder, theft, etc.), looking the same within the law of Christ as they did in the law of Moses. For example, when Christ fulfills the Mosaic law related to gender distinction (e.g., Deut. 22:5), he *maintains* all gender distinction. We could say similar things regarding the prohibitions against adultery, murder, theft, and so on. At one level, even these laws are intensified in that Jesus’ own life supplies believers with an unparalleled pattern for living the Godward life (Phil. 2:5–7; Heb. 12:1–3; 1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6) and an unparalleled power to do so (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18), specifically through his blood-bought pardon (Rom. 6:6–7, 22; 8:10) and promises (Rom. 8:32; 2 Cor. 1:20; 2 Peter 1:4). Nevertheless, Christian obedience to these instructions is very comparable to what Old Testament believers would have looked like in carrying out the laws. In contrast, when other laws hit the lens of Christ, they get “bent” in various ways. Consider these examples:

- When Christ fulfills the Mosaic law of the Sabbath (e.g., Deut. 5:12), he *transforms* it into sustained rest for the people of God. In Jesus, the kingdom rest to which the Sabbath pointed reaches its eschatological realization.
- Similarly, when Christ fulfills the Mosaic law regarding parapet-building (Deut. 22:5), we find the application *extended* in a way that necessitates care for neighbor in every area of one’s home-building.
- Finally, when Christ fulfills the Mosaic law associated with unclean food (e.g., Lev. 20:25–26), he *annuls* it, declaring all foods clean. Even though he rescinded the earlier diet restrictions, we can still benefit from these commands by considering what they tell us about God and how they magnify Jesus’ work. Nevertheless, we do not keep these laws in any way.

We must assess every law on its own terms in order to properly discern how it applies today. In the pages that follow, I will illustrate how Jesus fulfills four distinct laws in different ways, whether by maintaining it (gender distinction), transforming it (Sabbath), extending it (parapet-building), or annulling it (unclean food).

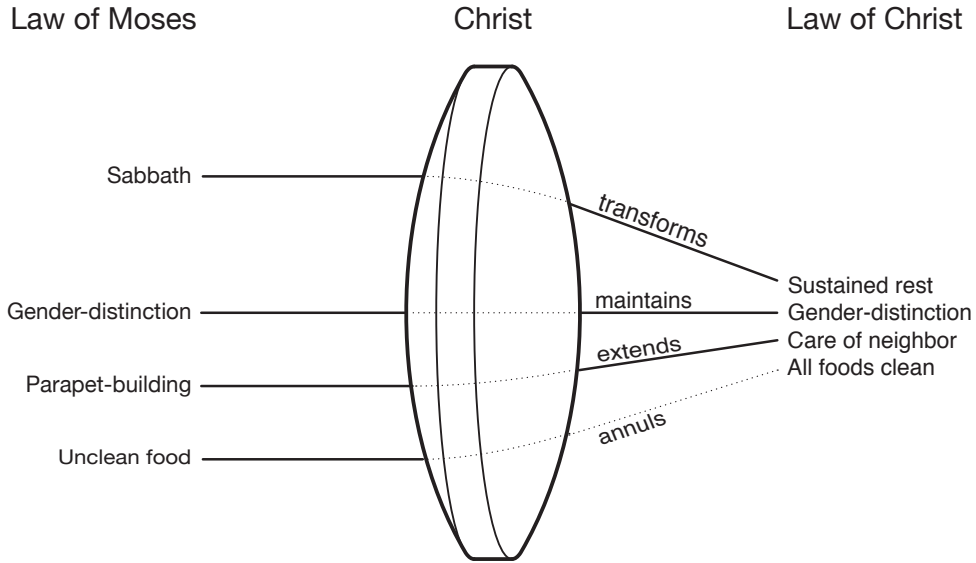


Fig. 12.3. The Law's Fulfillment through the "Lens" of Christ¹³

Another way to grasp our relationship to Old Testament law is to visualize two riverbanks separated at varying distances by water (fig. 12.4). The two sides symbolize the old and new covenant laws, and Jesus is the "bridge" over which we move from one side to the other. The length of the bridge and our distance from the specific Mosaic legislation changes depending on the nature of the law itself. The distance is always great enough that we can't access the other side apart from Christ, but some laws are so similar on each side of the bridge that the distance seems almost nonexistent (gender distinction, adultery, theft, etc.). Other laws, however, disclose substantial distance or changes (Sabbath, food laws, etc.).

13. I thank my student Benjamin Holvey, who initially inspired this lens illustration.

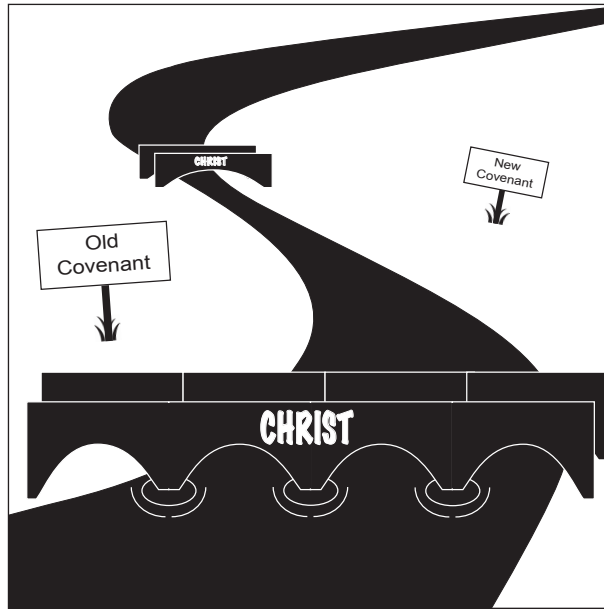


Fig. 12.4. The Law's Fulfillment over the "Bridge" of Christ

Regardless, when we approach the Old Testament through the lens of Christ, everything in the Old Testament operates as Christian Scripture written "for our instruction" (Rom. 15:4; cf. 4:23; 1 Cor. 10:11) and remains "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). We access and apply the Mosaic law only through Christ and in light of the teaching of his apostles, which together alone ground and sustain the church (Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20; cf. Matt. 7:24–27; 17:5; 28:20; John 16:12–14; 17:8, 18, 20; 2 Thess. 2:15; Heb. 1:1–2).¹⁴

14. For more on this redemptive-historical approach to a Christian's relationship to Old Testament law, see David A. Dorsey, "The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise," *JETS* 34, 3 (1991): 321–34; Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, 251–86; Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," 317–76; Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology*, 77–160, esp. 126–27, 157–60; Daniel M. Doriani, "A Redemptive-Historical Model," in *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Gary T. Meadors, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 75–121, responses to other contributors on pp. 51–56, 205–9, 255–61; Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology 7 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009); Meyer, "The Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016), 69–99; Thomas R. Schreiner, *40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law*, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010); Jason S. DeRouchie, "Making the Ten Count: Reflections on the Lasting Message of the Decalogue," in *For Our Good Always: Studies on the Message and Influence of Deuteronomy in Honor of Daniel I. Block*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Jason Gile, and Kenneth J. Turner (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 415–40; Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, NSBT 31 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013); William W. Combs, "Paul, the Law, and Dispensationalism," *DBSJ* 18 (2013): 19–39; Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism and Doing Ethics," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016), 218–21.

3. The Old Testament law portrays the character of God, anticipates Christ, and clarifies the makeup of love and wise living.

I have argued that, through Jesus, “every detail” of the Mosaic law matters for Christians. This is so for at least three reasons: The old covenant law (a) clarifies for believers the character of God, (b) serves as a prophetic witness to Christ, and (c) identifies how deep and wide love for God and neighbor goes.

a. The law portrays the character of God.

The Mosaic law is an expression of the character of God. The Lord asserted, “You shall . . . be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11:45), and Israel would fulfill this charge by heeding God’s words. “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, . . . you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:5–6). And again, “So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God” (Num. 15:40). Paul stressed that “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12). When we read the law of Moses, we get a glimpse into the very character of our great God.

b. The law anticipates Christ.

Along with portraying God’s character, the law points us to Christ, a note already stressed in the discussion on Christ’s law-fulfillment. Here I want to highlight the fact that every Old Testament ethical ideal finds embodiment in the divine Son of God. So Christians can use the Old Testament laws to move us to magnify all that God is for us in Jesus. We see this anticipated first in Deuteronomy 17:18–20, where the Lord gives parameters for kingship in Israel. The monarch will be a man of the book, never replacing YHWH but representing him perfectly as he lives out the law. He will have his own copy of Moses’ words, and he will read them daily, which will generate fear leading to obedience, humility, and a lasting kingdom. Jesus is the embodiment of this ideal.

Similarly, the divine servant is able to make “many to be accounted righteous” only because he himself is “righteous” and bears the iniquity of the guilty (Isa. 53:11; cf. 1 John 1:9–2:1). He was perfectly obedient (Rom. 5:19; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8) and sinless (John 8:46; 14:30; Heb. 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5), and for those in him, his life of perfect surrender provides freedom from the law’s condemning power and supplies for us all the righteousness that the law required. At the cross, God canceled “the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands” (Col. 2:13–14; cf. Gal. 3:13). This he accomplished by counting our sins to Jesus, by pouring out his wrath against Jesus in our stead, and by counting Jesus’ righteousness as ours: “For our sake [God the Father] made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Rom. 5:18–19; Heb. 9:28). Through Jesus, God “condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Rom. 8:3–4). I believe the latter text means that Christ’s perfect statute-keeping is applied to all who are in him, the proof of which is that we now walk by the Spirit.¹⁵

15. The singular use of δικαίωμα (“righteous requirement”) in Romans 5:18 strongly suggests that the singular use of the same term in 8:4 refers to Christ’s perfect obedience—his righteousness—counted as ours through our

c. *The law clarifies the makeup of love and wise living.*

Jesus said that “all the Law and the Prophets” depend on the dual commands to love God and love neighbor (Matt. 22:37–40). Stressing how love for neighbor really proves whether we love God, Jesus went further, saying, “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (7:12). Similarly, Paul stressed that “the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5:14). Significantly, not just a “moral” subset of the law but all the law—every commandment—is fulfilled in the call to love:

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Rom. 13:8–10)

In both the old and new covenants, love is *what* God’s people are to do. All the other commandments simply clarify *how* to do it. From this perspective, while the Mosaic law does not bear direct or immediate guidance in a Christian’s life, it does supply us with a pattern for how deeply and widely love for God and neighbor is to impact our lives.¹⁶

Indeed, even within ancient Israel, the familial, social, economic, and political structures as revealed in the Old Testament bore a testimonial purpose and were intended to provide a contextual paradigm of the values God desires for all peoples and in all times. We first see evidence of this fact in the life of Abraham, who YHWH says “obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Gen. 26:5). Using the very language of the Mosaic covenant (see Deut. 30:10; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 17:13, 34) to describe Abraham’s life of dependence identifies the paradigmatic nature of the Mosaic law.

If the Israelites would heed God’s voice, keep his covenant, and be his treasured possession, they would bear witness to YHWH’s greatness in the midst of the world (Ex. 19:5–6). By their living out the statutes and rules, the nations would see the uprightness

incorporation into him rather than to the Christian’s keeping of the law. On this, I agree with Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 483–84. Our walking by the Spirit is in turn evidence that we are justified, and Paul speaks of this walking both as fulfilling the law (Rom. 13:8, 10) and as keeping the law’s “righteous requirements” (δικαίωματα, plural accusative of δικαίωμα) through a circumcised heart and by the power of the Spirit (2:26; cf. Ezek. 36:27; Rom. 2:29). For an alternative view of Romans 8:4 that sees the “righteous requirement” as something that we are empowered to do instead of what Christ did for us, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 404–8, 690–95; Kevin W. McFadden, “The Fulfillment of the Law’s *Dikaiōma*: Another Look at Romans 8:1–4,” *JETS* 52, 3 (2009): 483–97.

16. For examples of a principizing approach to Old Testament law, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); Kaiser, “A Principizing Model,” in *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Gary T. Meadors, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 19–50; J. Daniel Hays, “Applying the OT Law Today,” *BSac* 158, 1 (2001): 21–35; Jerram Barrs, *Delighting in the Law of the Lord: God’s Alternative to Legalism and Moralism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 315–26. In my view, we must include a redemptive-historical lens in order to engage in a principizing approach faithfully.

of God's law and view Israel as both wise and understanding (Deut. 4:5–8). The Mosaic law, therefore, served to shape for the world a clear picture of righteous living.¹⁷

4. Summary

None of the old covenant law is directly or immediately legally binding on God's people, for Moses' commands are part of a covenant that has come to an end and of which we are not a part: "The law was our guardian until Christ came. . . . But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian" (Gal. 3:24–25). Nevertheless, Christians benefit from the Mosaic law in the way it portrays the character of God, anticipates Christ, and clarifies the nature of love and wise living. So while the Mosaic law does not serve as a direct or immediate legal judge or guide on the Christian, when we read it in light of Christ's law-fulfillment, it continues to impact us in both a revelatory and pedagogical way.¹⁸ This perspective led Paul to say, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Rom. 3:31).

Moses looked ahead to the eschatological age when God's transformed people would "keep all his commandments that I command you today" (Deut. 30:8). Similarly, Jeremiah envisioned that in the new covenant era, some who had once been evil neighbors—the Gentiles—would "diligently learn the ways" of God's people and by this "be built up" into their midst (Jer. 12:16). Ezekiel, too, said that when the Lord would pour out his Spirit, he would cause his people to "walk in my statutes [Lxx = pl. of δικαίωμα] and be careful to obey my rules" (Ezek. 36:27). It is the fulfillment of these anticipations that Paul describes in Romans 2:26, 29 when he says that Christian Gentiles were actually keeping "the precepts [pl. of δικαίωμα] of the law" by means of their circumcised hearts and by the power of the Spirit.¹⁹ It is also this law-fulfillment that the apostle says we accomplish when we love our neighbor (Rom. 13:8, 10). All of these texts identify levels of continuity between the "law of Moses" and the "law of Christ."

Isaiah, however, identified a level of discontinuity through progression, for in the messianic era the nations would gather to the new Jerusalem to hear YHWH's law as declared *through his royal servant* (Isa. 2:3; 42:4; 51:4). The Mosaic law finds fulfillment in and informs "the law of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:20–21; Gal. 6:2), which is also called "the perfect law," "the law of liberty," and "the royal law" (James 1:25; 2:8, 12). The Old

17. For more on the principlizing-paradigmatic approach to the Mosaic law, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 62–74, 182–211, 314–25; cf. Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994); Elmer A. Martens, "How Is the Christian to Construe Old Testament Law?," *BBR* 12, 2 (2002): 199–216; Peter T. Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch: An Exegetical Handbook*, Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 42–48; Daniel I. Block, "Preaching Old Testament Law to New Testament Christians," in *The Gospel according to Moses: Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 104–46, esp. 133–36; orig. published in *Hiphil (Scandinavian Evangelical E-Journal)* 3 (2006) 1–24, and subsequently published in three parts in *Ministry* 78, 5 (2006): 5–11; 78, 7 (2006): 12–16; 78, 9 (2006): 15–18. In my view, we must employ a redemptive-historical, Christological lens if we are to engage faithfully in the principlizing-paradigmatic approach.

18. On these distinctions, see Dorsey, "The Law of Moses and the Christian," 325, 331.

19. For this reading of Romans 2, see Simon J. Gathercole, "A Law unto Themselves: The Gentiles in Romans 2.14–15 Revisited," *JSNT* 24, 3 (2002): 27–49; Ardel B. Caneday, "Judgment, Behavior, and Justification according to Paul's Gospel in Romans 2," *JSPHL* 1, 2 (2011): 153–92; cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 136–45.

Testament law gives us fresh glimpses of God's character and the perfect righteousness of Christ and helps Christians better understand what a loving life looks like. In this way, the Old Testament law becomes useful "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16; cf. Matt. 5:17–20; 28:20; John 14:15; 1 Cor. 7:19; Titus 2:14; 1 John 2:3; 5:3).

Assessing the Threefold Division of the Law



In echo of what I have already argued above, Brian Rosner has asserted that Paul repudiated the Mosaic law as a law covenant, replaced the Mosaic law with the law of Christ, and reappropriated the Mosaic law both as prophecy that anticipates the gospel of Jesus and as wisdom intended to guide New Testament saints in our pursuit of God.²⁰ This seems right to me.

In minimal contrast to this approach, it is very common in evangelical circles, especially those related to covenant theology, to speak of three kinds of Mosaic laws:²¹

- **Moral laws** are those fundamental ethical principles that are eternally applicable, regardless of the time or covenant.
- **Civil laws** are related to Israel's political and social structures in the land and are time-bound.
- **Ceremonial laws** are those symbolic requirements related to Israel's religious ceremonies and cult worship that find their typological end in Christ.

In this view, as salvation history progresses through Christ, only the moral laws of the Mosaic legislation remain legally binding on Christians.

I appreciate this attempt to retain the lasting validity of at least some of God's old covenant instruction. I affirm that the coming of Christ clearly changes some laws more than others and that the commands of the law that Christians "fulfill" (see Rom. 13:8, 10; Gal. 5:14; cf. 6:2) in a fashion most similar with their function within the old covenant are those normally tagged as "moral."²² But I do not think that this particular approach is the most biblically faithful or devotionally helpful.²³

20. Rosner, *Paul and the Law*.

21. For an affirmation of this view, see Westminster Confession of Faith 19.3–5. These are *theological* categories, in contrast to the *content* distinctions of criminal, civil, family, cultic/ceremonial, compassion (see figs. 1.8 and 12.4).

22. Carson affirms these same two points in "Mystery and Fulfillment," 429.

23. Some in the classic Reformed tradition affirm this fact. For example, Vern S. Poythress, professor of New Testament interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary, reflects on the proposed division of the Old

1. The Bible never differentiates laws in this way but treats the law as a singular entity.

The Old Testament includes different types of laws based on content (i.e., criminal, civil, family, ceremonial, and compassion laws; see fig. 1.8 in chap. 1). Within this framework, the call to love was always considered more foundational than ritual (e.g., Deut. 6:5; 10:12; 1 Sam. 15:22–23; Isa. 1:11–17; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21–24; Mic. 6:8). At times, people applied the law in fresh ways (1 Chron. 15:12–15 with Num. 7:9; Deut. 10:8; 2 Chron. 30:2–3 with Num. 9:9–13), adapted it to new contexts (2 Chron. 29:34, 36 with Lev. 1:5–6; 2 Chron. 30:17–20; 35:5–6 with Ex. 12:21), or even developed it (2 Chron. 8:12–15; 29:25–30). We even have instances in which people failed to fulfill ceremonial obligations (Lev. 10:16–20) or engaged in ceremonially unlawful activity (1 Sam. 21:3–6; cf. Lev. 22:10; Matt. 12:4), and yet God did not hold them guilty.

Nevertheless, the Old Testament never distinguishes moral, civil, and ceremonial laws, and all laws remained binding. Leviticus 19, for example, shows little distinction between laws, mixing calls to love one's neighbor (vv. 11–12, 17–18) with various commands related to family (vv. 3a, 29), worship (vv. 3b–8, 26–28, 30–31), business practice (vv. 9–10, 13b, 19a, 23–25, 34b–36), care for the needy and disadvantaged (vv. 9–10, 13–14, 33–34), criminal and civil disputes (vv. 15–16, 35a), and ritual matters (v. 19b). No attempt is made to elevate certain laws over others.

Following the Old Testament prophets before him, Jesus did distinguish “weightier” and “lighter” matters of the law (Matt. 23:23; cf. 9:13; 12:7). Yet while he tagged as hypocritical those who were willing to tithe on their spice rack but unwilling to engage in the more difficult tasks of “justice and mercy and faithfulness,” he emphasized, “These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.” That is, he is not here saying that the “lighter matters” bear no lasting value. Instead, his focus was the overarching principles and purposes of the whole law and the underlying principles and purposes of the individual laws.

Furthermore, whether addressing the law's repudiation, replacement, or reappropriation, the New Testament consistently speaks of the whole law as a unit. Paul

Testament law into moral, civil, and ceremonial: “No simple and easy separation between types of law will do justice to the richness of Mosaic revelation. . . . The entirety of this Mosaic revelation simultaneously articulates general moral principles and symbolic particulars: it points forward to Christ as the final and permanent expression of righteousness and penal substitution (with moral overtones) but is itself, in that very respect, a shadow (with ceremonial overtones)” (*The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, 283). Similarly, Jerram Barrs, professor of Christian studies and contemporary culture at Covenant Theological Seminary, writes, “These divisions [between moral, civil, and ceremonial] are not hard and fast. For example, many of the ceremonial laws include moral and civil aspects. Many of the civil laws include moral aspects. A problematic consequence in this view, if it is held with systematic rigor, is that the beauties of the ceremonial and civil aspects of the law become lost to us during this present age” (*Delighting in the Law of the Lord*, 314). For further reflections on why dividing the law into these categories is not preferable, see Dorsey, “The Law of Moses and the Christian,” 329–31; D. A. Carson, “The Tripartite Division of the Law: A Review of Philip Ross, *The Finger of God*,” in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis: Essays in Honor of G. K. Beale*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 223–36; Combs, “Paul, the Law, and Dispensationalism,” 26–28; Rosner, *Paul and the Law*, 36–37; Meyer, “The Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ,” 87–89; Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism and Doing Ethics,” 218–21.

says, “The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and *any other commandment*, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Rom. 13:9). The call to love neighbor synthesizes not just a group of “moral” laws but every commandment. Jesus, too, spoke broadly when he asserted, “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” (Matt. 5:19). There is no special categorizing of laws here. James said, “Whoever keeps *the whole law* but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it” (James 2:10). Similarly, earlier Paul stressed that the whole “law” brought curse to all (Gal. 3:10), that in Christ we are no longer under the law covenant as a guardian (3:24–25), and that “every man who accepts circumcision . . . is obligated to keep the whole law” (5:3).

The New Testament repudiates *all* the Mosaic law, sees *all* the law replaced with the law of Christ, and reappropriates *all* the law as both a pointer to Christ and a guide for wise Christian living. The tripartite division of the law is simply not taught in Scripture.

2. All the laws express moral principles, and most of the so-called moral laws contain temporally or culturally bound elements.

The so-called civil laws simply provide examples of moral principles working their way out in Late Bronze and Iron Age culture. Also, the so-called ceremonial laws illustrate ethical or moral elements through symbolism, and by distinguishing itself from its pagan neighbors, Israel pointed to the uniqueness of YHWH over all, which is the greatest act of love that one could give. With this, we see many culturally bound features in the Ten Commandments, which are considered the chief example of “moral law”.²⁴

- The prologue identifies Israel as a people whom YHWH redeemed from slavery in Egypt (Deut. 5:6), and this element also grounds the call to rest in the Sabbath command (5:14–15).
- The idolatry command assumes a religious system that includes carved images (Deut. 5:8).
- The Sabbath command presumes the context of ancient Near Eastern bond service, geographically limited animals, and cities with gates (5:14); its use of נָכַר (“sojourner”) (5:14) implies the existence of the politically defined nation of Israel.
- The command to honor one’s parents directly points to the existence of the nation of Israel in the land of Canaan (5:16).

24. The initial five of these are taken from Dorsey, “The Law of Moses and the Christian,” 330; the last is noted in Daniel I. Block, “‘You Shall Not Covet Your Neighbor’s Wife’: A Study in Deuteronomistic Domestic Ideology,” *JETS* 53, 3 (2010): 449–74.

- The coveting commands assume a people acquainted with ancient Near Eastern bond service and with animals common in the Mediterranean world (5:21).
- The commands principally address household heads who enjoy wives, children, household servants, and property—all of which point to Israel's patricentric society.²⁵

This list should caution those who want to identify the Ten Commandments as moral law in distinction from civil or ceremonial.

3. We are to gain benefit from *all* the Old Testament, not just the moral portions.

Most theologians holding to the tripartite division of the Mosaic law affirm the lasting value of *all* Scripture. But the stress on the lasting relevance of the moral law in distinction to the secondary nature of the civil and ceremonial has moved many laymen to see books such as Leviticus as having little lasting relevance for Christians. Yet Paul drew pastoral insight from the instructions on temple service (1 Cor. 9:13–14), and he stressed that “all Scripture is . . . profitable” for Christians (2 Tim. 3:16). Are we not on firmer ground to emphasize how *every* commandment in all the law is fulfilled in our love of neighbor (Rom. 13:8, 10), rather than narrowing attention to only some of the law?

In light of these observations and my earlier arguments, I think it is best to see *none* of the Mosaic law as directly binding on Christians in a *legal* way but *all* the Mosaic law as significant for believers in a *revelatory* and *pedagogical* way, when read in light of Christ's fulfillment of the law. The old covenant law is not our legal code, but it was still written *for* us in order to portray the Lord's character, to direct our eyes to Jesus, and to clarify how deeply and widely love for God and neighbor should consume our lives.

How to Apply Old Testament Law



In this section I want to focus on the role of the Mosaic law as wisdom for Christians. How should a Christian go about reappropriating the Mosaic law in light of the fulfillment secured by Jesus? I here adopt the three general principles I set forth earlier in this chapter (see “General Guidelines for Applying Old Testament Teaching”), but now address them specifically to applying Old Testament law.²⁶

25. On the biblical vision of Israelite society's being centered on the father as servant leader (i.e., patricentric) as opposed to dominated by a father as self-exalting dictator (i.e., patriarchal), see Daniel I. Block, “Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel,” in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 33–102.

26. Some of this material is adapted from Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, 314–24; and Dorsey, “The Law of Moses and the Christian,” 332–33.

1. Establish the original revealed meaning and application of the law.

This includes three parts with respect to Old Testament laws.

a. Type

Recalling that this particular law was not given to us but to old covenant Israel, define the type of law it is in accordance with the five types I laid out in our discussion on the prophetic genre: criminal, civil, family, cultic/ceremonial, or compassion (fig. 1.8 in chap. 1).

| | |
|---|--|
| Criminal | Laws governing crimes or offenses that put the welfare of the whole community at risk; the offended party is the state or national community, and therefore the punishment is on behalf of the whole community in the name of the highest state authority, which in Israel meant YHWH. <u>SAMPLE ISSUES</u> : Kidnapping and homicide; false prophecy and witchcraft; adultery and rape. |
| Civil | Laws governing private disputes between citizens or organizations in which the public authorities are appealed to for judgment or called on to intervene; the offended party is not the state or national community. <u>SAMPLE ISSUES</u> : Accidental death and assault; theft and destruction of property; limited family issues such as premarital unchastity, postdivorce situations, and the mistreatment of slaves. |
| Family | Noncivil, domestic laws governing the Israelite household. <u>SAMPLE ISSUES</u> : Marriage and inheritance; the redemption of land and persons; family discipleship; care of slaves. |
| Cultic/ Ceremonial | Laws governing the visible forms and rituals of Israel's religious life. <u>SAMPLE ISSUES</u> : The sacred sacrifice, the sacred calendar, and various sacred symbols such as the tabernacle, priesthood, and ritual purity that distinguished Israel from the nations and provided parables of more fundamental truths about God and relating to him. |
| Compassion | "Laws" dealing with charity, justice, and mercy toward others. These are not exactly the kinds of laws that can be enforced in court, but God knows the heart. <u>SAMPLE ISSUES</u> : Protection and justice for the weak; impartiality and generosity; respect for persons and property. |
| For a more detailed overview, see figure 1.8 in chapter 1. Prepared by both Jason S. DeRouchie and Kenneth J. Turner. Originally published in DeRouchie, ed., <i>What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About</i> , 466–67. Used by permission. The five main categories are taken from Christopher J. H. Wright, <i>Old Testament Ethics for the People of God</i> (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 288–301, which he adapted from Anthony Phillips, <i>Ancient Israel's Criminal Law: A New Approach to the Decalogue</i> (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 2, 13. | |

Fig. 12.5. Types of Old Testament Laws by Content

b. Original Meaning and Significance

Assess the makeup of the law in its original context. Clarify its social function and relative status. Is it central or peripheral to the dominant themes and social objectives that we find in the rest of the material? Is it a primary expression of YHWH's values and priorities, or is it more secondary, reinforcing and supplying an example of a more primary law?

c. Original Purpose

We now consider the role that the law was intended to play in Israelite society, asking: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? How often? To what extent? For example:

- What kind of situation was this law trying to promote or prevent?
- Whose interests was this law aiming to protect?
- Who would have benefited from this law, and why?
- Whose power was this law trying to restrict, and how did it do so?
- What rights and responsibilities were embodied in this law?
- What kind of behavior did this law encourage or discourage?
- What vision of society motivated this law?
- What moral principles, values, or priorities did this law embody or initiate?
- What motivation did this law appeal to?
- What sanction or penalty (if any) was attached to this law, and what does that show regarding its relative seriousness or moral priority?

2. Determine the theological significance of the law.

a. Clarify what the law tells us about God and his ways.

What does the law disclose to us about God's unchanging character, desires, values, concerns, or standards? We learn about God through his law, and meditating on the Mosaic law should move us to worship him and to recognize and grieve over lawlessness as a direct affront to his person. It should also move us to celebrate his provision of Christ as the perfect law-keeper and righteousness-supplier.

b. Assess how Christ's law-fulfillment impacts the law.

God's character remains unchanged, which means that every expression of his eternal law at different times in the progress of salvation history can instruct every other age and culture. This is true even if the specific legislation is no longer binding because of the changes in covenant and historical-cultural context. The person and work of Christ completely embody the call to love God and neighbor, and he fulfills the law not only in the way that he perfectly met the law's demands but also in the way that he is the substance of all old covenant shadows (Col. 2:16–17). That is, he is the ultimate reality to which all the Old Testament types pointed, whether persons, events, or institutions. As we consider how the Mosaic law informs the law of Christ, some new covenant instructions look identical to the teaching of Moses, whereas other laws get transformed (e.g., Sabbath), extended (e.g., adultery includes lust), or annulled (e.g., sacrifices). Homosexuality is as wrong today as it was in the old covenant (Rom.

1:26–27; 1 Cor. 6:9), but unlike the Israelites, Christians are free to eat bacon because Jesus’ kingdom work rendered all foods clean (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:13–15). Because most often the various types of laws are all mixed up in the Pentateuch, we have to deal with each law on its own, considering how Christ’s fulfillment impacts any given law.

Significantly, no laws from the old covenant come to us directly. We do not obey the Ten Commandments, for example, simply because they are the Ten Commandments. Rather, each of the Ten Words meets us only through the lens of Christ, and every one of the Ten Words gets focused through him (see fig. 12.1). Even a command such as “Do not commit adultery” gains a new *pattern* in the life of Jesus (Phil. 2:5–7; Heb. 12:1–3; 1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6) and a new *power* through his work (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18). Christ embodies for us a perfect example of what living out the law of Christ looks like in the way he treated women and controlled his own desires with the aid of the Spirit, and he secures power for our own pursuit of holiness through his blood-bought pardon (Rom. 6:6–7, 22; 8:10) and blood-bought promises (Rom. 8:32; 2 Cor. 1:20; 2 Peter 1:4). Every law finds focus if not complete transformation in Christ—even those that his law-fulfillment does not change in nature.

c. *State in a single sentence the love principle behind the law.*

If indeed love is what God called the people to do and all the other commandments simply clarify how to do it (Matt. 7:12; 22:37–40; Rom. 13:8, 10; Gal. 5:14), we should be able to boil down every law into a *principle of love*. Being as detailed as possible, complete the following statement for every law: The call to love God/neighbor means/implies/impacts/necessitates _____.

3. Summarize the lasting significance of the law for today.

Here we preserve both the portrait of God and the love principle behind the law but change the context, all in light of Christ’s new covenant work. We consider the practical implications of the theological insights gained from this law for our own new covenant context. God’s nature is unchanging, but his purposes progress over time. Furthermore, we must consider not only living in light of the *pattern* that Christ set for us but also living by his gospel *power*. As similar as the old and new covenants are in many respects, the internalization of grace in all members marks the new covenant as a massive progression within salvation history.

Below I supply four examples that represent different ways in which Christ’s law-fulfillment impacts the application of Old Testament law to Christians. As noted, we must examine every law on its own terms in order to rightly understand its lasting significance in the new covenant. No preset categories (such as moral, civil, and ceremonial) determine whether certain laws are extended (Deut. 22:8), operate identically (22:5), are transformed (5:12), or are annulled (Lev. 20:25–26).

House-Building with Love in Deuteronomy 22:8



My first example of applying Old Testament law is a “slow-pitch, easy-hitter.” It illustrates how some laws get extended into new spheres as times and culture change.

| | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| כִּי תִבְנֶה בַּיִת חָדָשׁ | 5 | When you build a new house, |
| וַעֲשִׂיתָ מַעֲקֶה לְגִנְיָךְ | b | you shall make a parapet for your roof, |
| וְלֹא־תָשִׂים דָּמַיִם בְּבֵיתְךָ | c | that you may not bring the guilt of blood upon your house, |
| כִּי־יִפֹּל הַנִּפֹּל מִמֶּנּוּ: ס | d | if anyone should fall from it. |

Fig. 12.6. Deuteronomy 22:8 in MT and ESV

1. Establish the original revealed meaning and application of the law.

The conditional nature of the law suggests that it stands as a secondary application of a more fundamental principle. Flat roofs were and are common throughout the Middle East, for in the Mediterranean climate, the roof supplies an extra living space. A parapet is the low wall that surrounds the roof and that protects folks from accidentally falling off. Here we learn that a homeowner is responsible to build his house with a parapet to guard against the accidental death of others. The principal purpose of the law was clearly to minimize the number of domestic deaths brought about by avoidable accidents, negligence, or carelessness. Causing accidental death from negligence was a criminal act that could be curbed only by the offending party’s fleeing to a city of refuge (Ex. 21:13; Num. 35:9–15; Deut. 19:1–10). Deuteronomy 19:10 warns that if innocent blood is shed and the manslayer does not take the prescribed actions, “the guilt of the bloodshed” will remain on the people, thus incurring the wrath of God.

2. Determine the theological significance of the law.

We have a God who treasures the display of his image in humans and who calls us to value this display in others. If we take human life lightly, we are declaring that we take God lightly and will be judged. We see in Deuteronomy 22:8 a very gracious Lord who warns against dangers that could ultimately result in the harm of others and, by this, our harm.

Similarly, when Jesus used a coin to highlight the way in which God owns every person, he declared the lasting importance of God’s image in others: “Jesus said to them, ‘Whose likeness and inscription is this?’ They said, ‘Caesar’s.’ Then he said to them, ‘Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things

that are God's'" (Matt. 22:20–21). The Lord's image is on us, and therefore we owe him our lives.

Building on his value of God's image, Christ called for the application of love of neighbor in all contexts: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12). This Golden Rule is evident in our passage, and it suggests that Christ's followers today must maintain the call to love others in the most practical of ways—including how we ready our living space for guests. I summarize the main love principle of Deuteronomy 22:8: *Loving others means that we will make our living environment safe for them, removing all dangers and respecting God's image displayed in every life.*

3. Summarize the lasting significance of the law for today.

All homeowners bear the responsibility to watch out for the well-being of everyone who comes under their roofs. While many climates do not allow for houses with parapets, the teaching of Deuteronomy 22:8 is naturally extended to include building a fence around a pool or raised deck, placing a protective gate above a stairwell where toddlers are present, or shoveling a sidewalk after a snowstorm. Love for neighbor is to impact even the littlest details of our everyday lives, as we live under the supremacy of God in Christ. We love our neighbors in these small particulars of love because of the way that God has first loved us in Christ (1 John 4:11, 19). We must ever care for others' welfare, valuing God's image in them. This means that we will make our homes into places where others can thrive without undue safety risks.

Gender Confusion in Deuteronomy 22:5



The West is in the midst of a gender-identity crisis, and the brokenness that it is causing in our culture is tragic. I know that some of you reading this study have yourselves wrestled with gender identity or have been the victim of another's gender-identity crisis. I ache for you, and I long for you to know the healing that only Jesus can bring.

In light of what can be called a transgender storm, I want to consider the lasting relevance of Deuteronomy 22:5 for the church. As we will see, our alignment with this law should look today much as it did for Moses and the Israelites.²⁷

27. For a more expansive discussion of this text that attempts to model how to handle such a personal and difficult issue exegetically, theologically, and pastorally, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "Confronting the Transgender Storm: New Covenant Reflections on Deuteronomy 22:5," *JBW* 21, 1 (2016): 58–69. I have adapted the material that follows from this study.

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| לֹא־יִהְיֶה כְּלִי־גִבּוֹר עַל־אִשָּׁה | 5 | A woman shall not wear a man's garment, |
| וְלֹא־יִלְבֹּשׁ גִּבּוֹר שְׂמֹלֶת אִשָּׁה | b | nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, |
| כִּי תוֹעֵבֶת יִהְיֶה אֵלֶיךָ כָּל־עֲשֵׂה | c | for whoever does these things is an abomination to |
| אֱלֹהֵינוּ: | | the LORD your God. |

Fig. 12.7. Deuteronomy 22:5 in MT and ESV

1. Establish the original revealed meaning and application of the law.

While the law bears lasting import for new covenant believers (Deut. 30:8; Rom. 15:4), Moses originally wrote it to Israel, and our assessment must begin within this context. We can immediately note that the prohibition in Deuteronomy 22:5 appears less a core principle and more a secondary application of a more fundamental truth. On the surface, the verse relates to what could be called *gender expression*; yet the law assumes a more fundamental rule: that there are two biological sexes (male and female) and that what is gender-normative in God's world is that one's biological sex governs both one's gender identity and its expression. Before divine wrath is poured out, this text provides a kind of corrective to gender confusion and transgender identity.

Deuteronomy 22:5 stands independent of its context and simply comes to us as two prohibitions followed by a single motivation clause. In Hebrew, there are two types of negative commands—immediate (לֹא) and durative (לֹא־), and God chose to frame these prohibitions as durative, so that we should read the “not” as a “never”: “A woman shall *never* wear a man's garment, nor shall a man *ever* put on a woman's cloak.” From God's perspective, there is never a permissible time for the type of cross-dressing that this passage addresses.

Digging deeper into this law, we should note that the term translated “man” is גִּבּוֹר (“strong man”) and not the more common אִישׁ. Some have suggested that גִּבּוֹר means “warrior” here (cf. 2 Sam. 1:27; Ezek. 32:27),²⁸ but this meaning is more closely associated with the adjective גִּבּוֹר (“mighty one,” cf. Gen. 10:8–9; Deut. 10:17). Furthermore, within the Pentateuch all other instances of גִּבּוֹר simply overlap in meaning with אִישׁ, showing up in contexts that distinguish the men from the young (Ex. 10:7, 11) or from women and children (12:37).²⁹ The clear difference between גִּבּוֹר and אִישׁ is that, when paralleled with “woman” (אִשָּׁה) the term אִישׁ can often mean “husband,” whereas גִּבּוֹר never does in any of its twenty-four Old Testament uses. At the very least, then, this law concerning male-female relationships is not restricted to husbands and wives and thus family law but speaks to the broader society and community. *From God's perspective, the fact of maleness and femaleness bears implications beyond the home or gathered worshiping community. It also impacts daily life in society.*

28. E.g., J. Gordon McConville, *Deuteronomy*, ApOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 336–37.

29. “I גִּבּוֹר,” HALOT, 1:175.

The term used here for the woman's "cloak" (שִׁמְלָה) is restrictive, pointing specifically to the outer wrapper or mantle that a female would wear.³⁰ In contrast, the term rendered "garment" (כְּלִי) in relation to a man is broader and suggests any object associated with men—whether clothing (1 Sam. 21:5[H6]), vessel (1 Kings 10:21), ornament (Gen. 24:53), or piece of equipment (Num. 19:18) that was specifically associated with men.³¹ This could even include weapons of war (Gen. 49:5; Deut. 1:41; Judg. 9:54), but it was in no way limited here.

Within Israelite culture, therefore, certain styles of dress, ornaments, or items distinguished men and women. Thus, two things appear to be at stake in this law:

- Everyone needed to let individual gender expression align with one's biological sex; and
- Everyone needed to guard against gender confusion, so that others would not wrongly perceive a man to be a woman and a woman to be a man based on dress.

Whether arising from pagan religious activity or from a desire to engage in roles restricted to the opposite sex, such practices opposed any form of godliness.³²

The fact that this type of cross-dressing is here called an "abomination to the LORD" highlights the gravity of the offense and associates it with not only the crimes of idolatry (Deut. 13:14; 17:4) and witchcraft (18:12) but also the sin of dishonest gain, which could relate at the level of criminal, civil, or family law (25:16). What is it about idolatry, witchcraft, and dishonesty that make them abominable to the Lord? Idolatry gives glory to someone other than YHWH; witchcraft looks to means other than God's Word to discern the future or his will; dishonest gain diminishes the value of God's image in others. We must conclude, therefore, that something about cross-dressing and gender confusion directly counters the very nature of God.

This raises the likelihood that what makes transgenderism abominable is that it maligns humanity's ability to reflect, resemble, and represent God rightly in this world. The possibility that it is also a criminal offense suggests that the sin actually endangers the welfare of the entire community. The clear distinctions between men and women laid out in Genesis 1 and 2 and maintained throughout the Pentateuch further suggest that this law bears a symbolic element. Those born boys are to live and thrive as boys, and those born girls are to live and thrive as girls. When

30. "שִׁמְלָה," HALOT, 3:1337.

31. "כְּלִי," HALOT, 2:478.

32. Harry A. Hoffner Jr. argues that the transgender practices evidenced here were potentially connected to the pagan religious rites or magical practices of Israel's neighbors ("Symbols for Masculinity and Femininity," *JBL* 85, 3 [1966]: 326–34). While that is possible, nothing in Deuteronomy 22 explicitly links the text to cultic ritual (so too P. J. Harland, "Menswear and Womenswear: A Study of Deuteronomy 22:5," *ExpTim* 110, 3 [1998]: 74–75). For further reflections on ancient Israel's problem of cross-dressing, see Nili S. Fox, "Gender Transformation and Transgression: Contextualizing the Prohibition of Cross-Dressing in Deuteronomy 22:5," in *Mishneh Todah: Studies in Deuteronomy and Its Cultural Environment in Honor of Jeffrey H. Tigay*, ed. Nili S. Fox, David A. Glatt-Gilad, and Michael J. Williams (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 49–71.

corrupt desires are leading us to deviate from this course, we must choose with God's help the path that best magnifies the majesty of God, and that path is defined in Deuteronomy 22:5.

As for the purpose of the law, its objective appears to have been to maintain divinely created gender distinctions within the community of faith. The goal of this pursuit was to nurture an environment that properly displays the supremacy of God and the ever-present Head-helper distinction between God and the people he is creating for himself.

2. Determine the theological significance of the law.

Deuteronomy 22:5 is the fruit of this truth: YHWH is ever passionate to preserve and display right order in his world. This is the essence of his righteousness, and maintaining gender distinctions is an important part of this order. The stress in Genesis 1–2 on the way in which males and females image God and the Pentateuch's depiction of YHWH's relationship with Israel as a marriage push readers to view our biological sex and gender identity and expression as being first and foremost about God. The rest of the Old Testament highlights this parabolic purpose of sex and gender distinctions in books such as Hosea (chaps. 1–3; cf. Judg. 2:16–17; Isa. 1:21; 57:3; Jer. 2:2, 20; 3:1, 8–11; 31:31–32), and then the same idea is carried into the New Testament (see Matt. 9:15; 12:38–39; 16:1–4; Mark 2:19; 8:38; Luke 5:34), most clearly where Paul portrays the church as Christ's bride (Eph. 5:22–27; cf. Rev. 19:7–9; 21:9). To the level that we flatten the inborn distinctions between maleness and femaleness, we flatten the distinctions between the sovereign Savior and the saved, between the exalted and the needy, between the Blameless One and the sinner. We take glory away from God and his Christ when we act as though distinctions between men and women were nonexistent. And we hurt the entire community both in the way that we fail to point them to gospel righteousness and in the way that we open them up for God's just wrath.

How does Christ's law-fulfillment affect this law? We can first say that Christ and his followers continued to distinguish men from women. Indeed, Jesus perfectly exemplified maleness in the way that he deeply respected femaleness, standing as the ultimate provider and protector and leader in servant-hearted love. Jesus:

- Respected his parents (Luke 2:41–52; John 2:1–11);
- Had female disciples (Luke 8:1–3);
- Sought to protect women from male abuses (Matt. 5:27–32; 19:3–12; Luke 7:36–50);
- Portrayed women as models of faith (Matt. 25:1–13; Mark 7:24–30; Luke 4:24–26; 11:31; 18:1–8; 21:1–4);
- Extended care and healing to marginalized female sufferers (Mark 1:30–31; 5:25–43; 7:24–30; Luke 7:11–17; 13:10–17; John 4:1–42; 7:53–8:11; 11:1–44);
- Received anointing from women (Luke 7:36–50; John 12:1–8); and
- Disclosed himself first to women after his resurrection (Matt. 28:9; John 20:14–18).

Christ is the substance to which all biblical symbols point, but unlike some pictures such as the temple and clean and unclean laws, which have reached their terminus in Christ's first appearing, the distinction between males and females will continue at least to the consummation (as is clear in texts such as Ephesians 5:22–33 and 1 Timothy 3:4–5). And even then, while earthly marriage will be no more (Matt. 22:30)—the picture being overcome by the reality—there is no reason to think that the distinction between men and women, heads and helpers within the community of faith, will alter in the new heavens and earth (cf. Rev. 21:24, where “kings” are distinguished). Maleness and femaleness will most likely provide an eternal reminder of God's order in reality, in which he is supreme over all.

Along with this, new covenant teaching maintains role distinctions between men and women, most explicitly in its instructions to husbands and wives (e.g., Eph. 5:22–32; 1 Peter 3:1–7) and to local churches regarding their corporate worship, teaching, and leadership (1 Cor. 11:1–16; 14:33–35; 1 Tim. 2–3; Titus 1:5–16). It also calls for men to live as men, for women to live as women, and for the young to be trained to live out the gender role related to their God-given sex (Titus 2:2–6). Paul exhorted Timothy to respect and encourage older men as fathers, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, in all purity (1 Tim. 5:1–2). All this instruction assumes that we can rightly identify those who are men and those who are women.

Paul asserted that every Old Testament commandment is summarized in the call to love our neighbor (Rom. 13:8, 10). Jesus, too, said that “whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12). With every law in the Old Testament, we should therefore be able to boil it down into a single principle of love. In Deuteronomy 22:5, *loving others and God means that people will maintain a gender identity that aligns with their biological sex and will express this gender in a way that never leads to gender confusion in the eyes of others*. We should always be able to distinguish boys as boys and girls as girls. When our biological sex aligns with our gender identity and our gender expression, we express love for both God and our neighbor.

3. Summarize the lasting significance of the law for today.

Deuteronomy 22:5 was not originally given to the church, but it contains a portrait of God and a principle of love that can guide the church today when read in light of the finished work of Christ. In Jesus we have a perfect pattern for maleness in relation to femaleness. With this, in Jesus we are supplied with unmatched power for our pursuit of rightly ordered living. The power comes through the pardon that Jesus secured at the cross and the promises that he purchased there. The gender-identity crisis that we are facing today can be rightly confronted only in the context of past and future grace.

We have already noted that God's passion for right order has not changed in the new covenant, for it is part of his very being. With this, the physical and role distinctions between men and women have not changed this side of the cross. God's righteousness is unswerving, and we must be ever concerned to display the magnificence of Christ's love for his church in every situation of life.

This affirmed, Deuteronomy 22:5 becomes instructive for the church in helping us recognize the appropriate path for gender expression and the sinfulness of gender confusion, which includes cross-dressing and transgender practice. Clothing stores in the West still distinguish men's and women's clothing, and there are certainly styles that are more masculine or more feminine than others. As believers, we should be among those who celebrate men's being masculine and women's being feminine, even in the way we dress. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that in our present culture, ladies can wear slacks, collars, and even ties (in a context such as serving in a restaurant), with none questioning their femaleness. The church needs to account for this. What was at stake in Moses' law was gender confusion, and from this perspective our outward apparel matters.

Because the law is focused on adults and also because it addresses gender *confusion*, the law itself would not directly dissuade a young girl from dressing up with a mustache in a kids' play or a little boy's putting on a girl's dress after ransacking the dress-up box. No viewer of this "cuteness" would be confused regarding the child's gender. Nevertheless, we must be cautious here, because we are always guiding our children into what is appropriate, and we are now living in a society that acts as though gender were a matter of choice rather than providence. This is abominable, and Deuteronomy 22:5 speaks directly against this perspective.

As I close this section, I call the church to be mindful of those broken in this gender-identity crisis and to care deeply for the violators and the violated. One's self-identity will be forever maligned so long as we are looking at a mirror and not into the face of Jesus Christ. We need to help those struggling with transgender identity find a new identity in Christ, and we need to help those who have been hurt by others find the healing and relief that only Jesus brings. He alone is the Savior. He alone is the Healer.

Keeping the Sabbath in Deuteronomy 5:12



My next example of applying old covenant law on this side of the cross relates to the Sabbath command, one of the disputable matters that Christians must not allow to separate us, even while we seek to become increasingly strong in faith with consciences that are calibrated to the truth of Scripture (Rom. 14:1–15:7, esp. 14:5).³³ This law will show us how important it is to consider Christ's law-fulfillment, which in this instance we will see fully transforms the law.

33. For a helpful discussion of how fellow Christians should relate when their consciences disagree about disputable matters, see Andrew David Naselli and J. D. Crowley, *Conscience: What It Is, How to Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 84–117.

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| שְׁמֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקֹדֶשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ | 12 b | Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. |
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Fig. 12.8. Deuteronomy 5:12 in MT and ESV

1. Establish the original revealed meaning and application of the law.

That Numbers 15:32–36 declares death on the high-handed Sabbath-breaker identifies the Sabbath instruction as criminal law. There was something about maintaining the weekly 6 + 1 rhythm of life that impacted the entire community for good, yet failure would impact them negatively.

Along with being identified with criminal law, the Sabbath appears to have also been linked with ceremonial law, for it bears a lot of symbolism. Within the context of the Ten Commandments, the purpose of the law is explicit—to ensure that household heads would supply every household member, including the servants, with a day of rest (Deut. 5:14). Within the context of the whole Pentateuch, however, the law’s objective appears to be broader.

YHWH tagged the Sabbath as the “sign” (אֹת) of the Mosaic covenant, which suggests that the law was primary and fundamental rather than secondary and illustrative. We are told that the purpose of the covenant sign was that Israel might “know that I, the LORD, sanctify you” (Ex. 31:13; cf. 31:17). In the Israelites’ journey from Egyptian slavery to Mount Sinai, they learned that the Sabbath would test their obedience and nurture trust in YHWH as the great provider (16:4–5, 23–26). By not working one day a week and by trusting God to supply their daily bread, the people’s keeping the Sabbath would result in their growth in holiness.

Yet the sign of the Sabbath also served to remind Israel of her identity and purpose as a people in relation to the whole world. The Exodus version of the Sabbath command grounds it in the original creation week (20:11; 31:17), whereas the version in Deuteronomy links it to the exodus (Deut. 5:15). The Sabbath is therefore explicitly connected with the two greatest Old Testament initiatory acts: God’s creation of the world and his creation/redemption of a people for himself.

For God, the culmination of the creation week was a rest born not of laziness but of sovereignty, in which the Great King, having established the sacred space of his kingdom, sat enthroned, enjoying peace with all that he had made (Gen. 2:1–3; cf. Ps. 132:7–8, 13–14). While mankind’s rebellion at the fall did not remove God’s right and authority over all things, it did alter the state of universal peace or rest. Thus, within the Pentateuch, the 6 + 1 pattern of creation is used not simply as a portrait of what was but as an image of what should be, and this ideal becomes directly attached to the Israelites’ commission to honor God among the nations (Ex. 19:4–6; Deut. 4:5–8; 26:18–19) and for their royal representative to operate as the instrument of curse-reversal and global blessing (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:17b–18; 26:4; 28:14). The Sabbath was to serve as a weekly reminder to the community that Israel’s calling (as a people and, ultimately, through the Messiah) was to stand as the agent through whom God’s

sovereignty would be celebrated once again on a global scale. It is in this context that Moses stresses in the Ten Words that “the seventh day is a Sabbath *to the LORD*” (Deut. 5:14); it was ultimately kept in order to see God exalted over all. For Israel, then, the Sabbath represented a future reality to which both Israel and the world were to hope.

2. Determine the theological significance of the law.

We learn a number of things about God from the Sabbath command: (a) YHWH is a God who ever watches out for the least. He shows no partiality and emphasizes the need for regular rest for ourselves and those in our care. (b) YHWH is a God who sanctifies by providing means in our daily lives to test our trust and to develop our dependence. The weekly Sabbath did this for Israel. (c) The Sabbath teaches us that YHWH is a God who is passionate to restore and display right order in his world, in which he is exalted as sovereign over all. He created Israel for the sake of reconciling the world, and Israel’s weekly Sabbath was to ever remind the people of their purpose of seeing the ultimate Sabbath restored on a global scale. This is what it means that the Sabbath was kept “to the LORD” (Deut. 5:14).

As we consider Christ’s law-fulfillment, we recall that Jesus saw himself as establishing God’s kingdom and as the source of mankind’s ultimate rest. We read in Matthew 11:27–30: “All things have been handed over to me by my Father . . . Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Significantly, it is directly after this assertion that Matthew includes the story of Jesus’ allowing his disciples to pluck heads of grain on the Sabbath and then declaring himself both “greater than the temple” (12:6) and “lord of the Sabbath” (12:8). Such a testimony was an overflow of the fact that not only was “the kingdom of heaven . . . at hand” (10:7), but also “the kingdom of God has come upon you” (12:28; cf. Luke 17:21).

In contrast to the views of some, I do not believe that the divine Sabbath of the original creation week continued after the fall. As Jesus asserted directly after healing a lame man on the Sabbath, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (John 5:17). Jesus’ redeeming work brought Israel’s global Sabbath mission to fulfillment. He is the one through whom the world is blessed (Gen. 22:17b–18; Acts 3:25–26; Gal. 3:8, 14), and by his victorious resurrection he inaugurated the end-times Sabbath rest as a culmination of his new-creation work. Jesus stands superior to Moses (Heb. 3:1–6), and those of us in him have already entered rest, even though we await its full consummation (4:3–10).

A love principle stands behind the Sabbath command in Deuteronomy 5:12–15. I would summarize it as follows: *Loving God and neighbor requires carrying out the 6 + 1 pattern of life as a witness to the kingdom hope of ultimate rest.*

3. Summarize the lasting significance of the law for today.

Until the final judgment, God will ever retain his commitment to his kingdom community, even those whom the world considers “least.” As believers look out for the

marginalized among the people of God, we serve King Jesus (Matt. 25:31–40). This is a sustained application of the old covenant Sabbath command on this side of the cross.

Not only this, the Old Testament command to keep the Sabbath teaches us of our own need as humans to rest, both to restore energy and to nurture increased dependence on God. “It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep” (Ps. 127:2). Resting is a key means of divine grace to counter human tendencies toward workaholism and to nurture deeper levels of trust in God. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5), and therefore he continues to mercifully humble us so that we might enjoy more grace. These, too, are general applications of the Sabbath command that continue today.

We must wrestle directly, however, with the place of the Sabbath in the Christian’s life. As the sign of the old covenant, the Sabbath was by nature teleological, pointing toward a goal. It stood at the end of every Israelite’s week and symbolized sovereign rest as the goal of life. In contrast, for the believer in Christ Jesus, fulfillment of God’s sovereign rest has already been inaugurated, the “shadow” finding its “substance” in Christ (Col. 2:16–17). As representative of national Israel, Jesus fulfills its Sabbath-generating mission, and through him the kingdom authority of God is once again realized on a global scale, moving out through the church from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Jesus declared, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18), and we must affirm that God has already put “everything in subjection to him,” leaving “nothing outside his control,” though “we do not yet see everything in subjection to him” (Heb. 2:8). In this church age, believers are enjoying Sabbath rest under the lordship of God in Christ all seven days of the week (Matt. 11:28–29; Heb. 4:8–11; cf. Rom. 15:5–6). Because we already “share in Christ” (Heb. 3:14), we have already entered the Sabbath rest he secures (4:9–10). We are no longer striving to confirm our eternal destiny but are resting, certain that what Christ has already accomplished will be fully revealed at the future consummation.

In the new covenant there is not one specific day as opposed to others that marks the Sabbath. Christ’s resurrection initiates an eschatological shift from old creation to new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), from Sabbath-anticipation to Sabbath-fulfillment. Now seven days a week, those in Christ live in the context of Sabbath rest.

Like that of the early church, our corporate worship follows a 1 + 6 rather than 6 + 1 pattern, gathering on the first day of the week, not the last (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). Why? All the Gospel writers highlight that Jesus rose on Sunday (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1), and by this they identify that Israel’s vision of seeing Sabbath realized was accomplished on that resurrection Lord’s Day (Rev. 1:10). On that first day of the week, light dawned over the darkness, new creation was initiated, and God’s kingdom in Christ began to be realized. Sunday worship reflects that inaugurated nature of our rest that we enjoy all the rest of the week. It also nurtures within us hope for the day when our faith will become sight (2 Cor. 5:7)

and when the rest that we already taste will be completed through the removal of all evil, pain, and death when we see our Savior face to face (Rev. 21:4; 22:3). As we currently enjoy Sabbath rest every day of the week, we magnify the curse-overcoming work of Christ, even as we continue to pray, “Your kingdom come . . . on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

In the end, the Old Testament call to keep the Sabbath establishes a sustained principle of rest for believers—resting so that we can run. We need to take breaks to refuel for our divine service, and sleep serves as a means of God’s grace to nurture sustained dependence and surrender in our souls (Ps. 127:2). Nevertheless, in Christ no single day is more important than another, and God-dependent work on any day of the week is sanctified to the Lord. We must maintain a pattern of corporate worship (Heb. 10:25), and Sunday is a natural time for this (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2) because of its eschatological significance of being the day on which God initiated his new-creation kingdom (Acts 26:23; Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 15:20, 23; 2 Cor. 5:17; 2 Thess. 2:13; Rev. 14:4). But corporate worship on another day of the week is not sin, nor is it necessarily wrong to paint your house, weed your garden, study for an exam, or engage in sports on a Sunday—so long as you work hard, as on every other day, in a way that never replaces grace (1 Cor. 15:10; Phil. 2:12–13; Col. 1:29). In all times and in all ways we must live and labor by faith in the one from whom, through whom, and to whom are all things (Rom. 11:36), so that “in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 4:11).³⁴

Forbidden Food in Leviticus 20:25–26



My final illustration of the lasting significance of Old Testament law for Christians addresses a command that Christ’s coming annuls, yet in a way in which we can still find significant Godward benefit from the law itself while celebrating the progressions in salvation history.

34. For more on this approach to the Sabbath command, see Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology*, 215–36; Thomas R. Schreiner, “Good-Bye and Hello: The Sabbath Command for New Covenant Believers,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016), 159–88.

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| <p>וְהִבַּדְלֵתֶם בֵּין-הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְהוֹרָה לְטֹמֵאָה וּבֵין-הָעוֹף הַטָּמֵא לְטָהוֹר וְלֹא-תִשְׁקְצוּ אֶת-נַפְשֵׁיכֶם בַּבְּהֵמָה וּבָעוֹף וּבְכָל אֲשֶׁר תֵּרַמַּשׁ הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר-הִבַּדְלֵתִי לָכֶם לְטֹמֵא: וְהִייתֶם לִי קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה וְאִבְדַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִן-הָעַמִּים לְהִיּוֹת לִי:</p> | <p>25 You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. b You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. 26 You shall be holy to me, b for I the Lord am holy c and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.</p> |
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Fig. 12.9. Leviticus 20:25–26 in MT and ESV

1. Establish the original revealed meaning and application of the law.

Distinguishing between “the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean,” was vital within Israel’s religious life (Lev. 10:10; cf. 11:46–47; 20:25–26). I define God’s holiness as *the reality and value of his divine fullness, expressed in his self-sustainability, his absoluteness and sole-ness, his excellence and worth, and the beautiful harmony of all his acts with that fullness*. Divine holiness is the embodiment of what it means to be God, and the Lord called his people to image his unique excellence and beauty to the world: “You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine” (Lev. 20:26).

Within the old covenant, *holy* and *common* related to a person, object, space, or time’s state or status in relation to the Lord; everything not holy was common. Similarly, *unclean* and *clean* were distinct conditions associated with the ritual or moral standing of people, food, and space. What was clean could be either holy or common, and what was common could be either clean or unclean. (These relationships are represented by the adjoining boxes in figure 12.10.) What was holy, however, was neither to come in contact with what was unclean (= contamination) nor to be treated as if it were unclean (= desecration). (In figure 12.10, their boxes do not touch.)

Holiness and uncleanness were also dynamic, in that the particular state or condition sought to influence and overcome its parallel state or condition. (Figure 12.10 highlights this by the dotted lines, directional arrows, and bold-italics font.) But the common and clean were static, unable to transfer their state or condition, and they were understood only in relation to their partner: cleanness was the absence of uncleanness, and commonness was the absence of holiness.

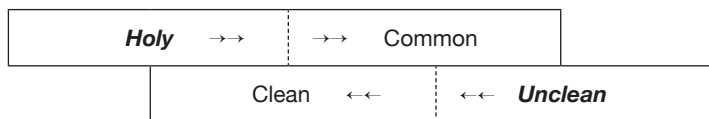


Fig. 12.10. The Holiness Continuum³⁵

35. For this basic understanding of the holiness continuum in Leviticus, see John E. Hartley, “Holy and Holiness,

What was it about certain foods that made them unclean? Scholars have offered different answers,³⁶ but in my view the best response is that all unclean animals symbolically bore some association with the God-hostility or curse of the serpent in Genesis 3.³⁷

The first explicit distinction between clean and unclean animals occurs in the narrative of Noah's flood, when YHWH directed Noah to take "seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate, and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate, and seven pairs of the birds of the heavens also, male and female, to keep their offspring alive on the face of all the earth" (Gen. 7:2–3; cf. v. 8). Noah then used "some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird" when he offered burnt offerings to the Lord following the deluge (8:20). Significantly, the account contains no clear instruction regarding the clean-unclean distinction. Noah appears to have already been well aware of this dichotomy, and Moses assumes that we as readers of the Pentateuch will make the necessary connections. Before the flood story, the place where forbidden food and animals are most clearly discussed is in the fall narrative of Genesis 3, so the reader is pushed back there to find answers.

Within this framework, the division between clean and unclean animals is most naturally understood as a result of the Adamic curse. I propose that the ancients considered as unclean those animals most closely associated with either the murderous activity of the serpent or the divine punishment against him. The serpent was "more crafty than any other beast of the field" (Gen. 3:1), moved the man and woman to eat what God had forbidden (2:17; 3:1–7), and was cursed more than "all livestock and all beasts of the field" (3:14). The beasts most imitating the serpent's "craftiness" are those predatory in nature (those with a will to kill), all of which were "unclean." Those animals most identified with the serpent's dust-eating, death-culminating curse would be bottom-feeders (the realm of dust) and those linked in any way to the realms of death and waste, all of which were "unclean."

More specifically, Leviticus 11 distinguishes the land, water, and air animals. Not all the associations with Genesis 3 are easy to assess, but a general pattern does seem clear. Naturally, we are having to "read between the lines," but I offer this schema as an alternative to other less biblically grounded proposals that scholars have suggested.

Among the terrestrial creatures, the clean include those that are both split-hooved and cud-chewing (Lev. 11:2–8). Hooved animals are ungulates, animals that use the tip of their toe (or hoof) to support the weight of their bodies. They thus touch as little of the *dust* as possible, their weight resting on the hard or rubbery sole and a hard wall formed by a thick nail rolled around the tip of the toe. Clean animals had to be both

Clean and Unclean," *DOT*:P 420–31; Jacob Milgrom, "Holy, Holiness, OT," *NIDB* 2:850–58. For an alternative view, see Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 26.

36. For a survey, see Hartley, "Holy and Holiness, Clean and Unclean," 428–29; cf. Walter Houston, *Purity and Monotheism: Clean and Unclean Animals in Biblical Law*, JSOTSup 140 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 68–123.

37. Jacob Milgrom does not make this point, but he does suggest that the underlying principle between clean and unclean was the life-death nexus, in which clean is connected to life, and unclean to death (*Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3 [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998], 1001–3). Milgrom sees a level of randomness in the distinction between clean and unclean beasts, but he notes that Scripture promotes reverence for blood and life by limiting Israel's flesh intake to a minimal number of animals—herbivores from domesticated cattle and some wild game, fish, birds, and locusts.

split-hooved (double protection from the cursed dust) and cud-chewing, the latter of which means that they were ruminants—herbivores that spend extra time “ruminating” (or meditating) on the food that God supplies. No clean land animal was a predator. The unclean land animals were those that do not align with both the features above. They were animals with paws—those walking directly on the ground with no “protection” (11:27). They were also all the swarming creatures, which surround and infest (11:29–31) or which have multiple legs and crawl on their bellies in the dust (11:41–43).

As for the water creatures, clean animals were those with both fins and scales (11:9–12). Fins propel and give balance, whereas scales shield or guard. The unclean subterranean creatures were those that lacked this type of stability or protection—features also missing from Adam’s leadership in the garden.

Finally, Leviticus gives no specific criteria to distinguish clean flying animals, though it does list nonpermitted birds and insects (11:13–23). Those bugs that hop on the ground (perhaps portraying the defeat of the curse) are clean. In contrast, all birds of prey that thrive on consuming flesh are unclean, as are all winged insects that do not hop on the ground but rest there.

Before the fall, God forbade the eating of a certain food (the tree of knowledge related to good and evil) in order to supply a context for mankind to mature in wisdom (Gen. 2:17; cf. 3:5). Adam and Eve failed to obey, still gaining knowledge of good and evil but by the wrong means (3:22). The result was that God cursed the world, and from this he also forbade a new food—unclean animals (7:2–3). This group of creatures were most likely identified by some commonality with the death-causing activities of the serpent or the curse connected with him.

Leviticus 20:25–26 identifies that one purpose of the clean- and unclean-food laws was to separate Israel from the nations. Because Israel’s pagan neighbors were part of the serpent’s offspring and represented the chaos, disorder, and death associated with him, the meaning Israel associated with unclean food paralleled the makeup of the nations themselves. So the Israelites’ diet symbolically distinguished them from the peoples around them. It also set them up to point the world to YHWH’s uniqueness (Ex. 19:5–6; Deut. 4:5–8), ultimately as the only Savior who could overcome curse with blessing (Gen. 12:3; 22:18).

2. Determine the theological significance of the law.

We have a God who is holy and whom we and the world should see and celebrate for who he is. John Hartley notes that within the old covenant, the rules dealing with clean and unclean animals “made the Israelites conscious at every meal that they were to order their lives to honor the holy God with whom they were in covenant.”³⁸ For example, the ancient call to not eat pork served to heighten awe of YHWH’s nature and worth and to distinguish God’s people from those outside the covenant. We are told that pig’s flesh was unclean because these animals do not chew their cud (Lev.

38. Hartley, “Holy and Holiness, Clean and Unclean,” 429. The truth of this statement is heightened by the fact that the call to be holy as God is holy is directly associated with food regulations in three spots (Lev. 11:44–45; 20:25–26; Deut. 14:21; cf. Ex. 22:31).

11:7–8). Some propose that the lack of this activity symbolized a failure to appreciate God’s provision³⁹—much as Adam and Eve failed to value God’s provision in the garden. Pigs are indiscriminate with respect to their diet, not only in the way that they will eat meat, vegetables, and even garbage but also in the way that females at times attack and even consume their own young. These features may further identify why the Lord tagged them as unclean.

Today, however, with the progression of redemptive history, Jesus has “declared all foods clean” (Mark 7:19), stressing that it’s not what goes into a person’s mouth but what comes out of a person’s heart that defiles him (7:18–23).⁴⁰ Paul designates sin as impurity (Rom. 6:19; 2 Cor. 12:21; Eph. 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:7), and he calls us as Christians to “cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit” (2 Cor. 7:1). We are to be pure *in heart* (Matt. 5:8; cf. 2 Tim. 2:22) and to have a clean conscience (1 Tim. 1:5; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3). Nevertheless, with respect to foods, there is nothing unclean anymore. The Lord gave Peter a vision of unclean animals, commanded him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat,” and then asserted, “What God has made clean, do not call common” (Acts 10:10–15). From this Peter inferred that God would have believers in Christ no longer “call any person common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). This was the natural implication in light of the way in which unclean foods separated the Lord’s people from the nations in the old covenant (Lev. 20:25–26). Jesus “has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility [between Jews and Gentiles] by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace” (Eph. 2:14–15). Sadly, Peter himself was inconsistent in his application of this change, and Paul had to confront him (Gal. 2:11–14).

Now we must ask, “What exactly happened in salvation history to make all foods clean?” Paul states that the change directly relates to what Jesus did “through the cross” (Eph. 2:16)—Christ “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them” (Col. 2:15). That is, in Jesus’ first coming “the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan” (Rev. 12:9).⁴¹ Unclean foods represented the God-hostility and curse identified with the first creation and fall. In Christ, however, the new creation is inaugurated (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), the curse is overcome by blessing (Gal. 3:13–14), and all foods are now symbolically clean.⁴²

39. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 54.

40. That no food is “common” suggests that all food is also “holy” (Acts 10:14–15).

41. An amillennialist would further hold that this is the exact eschatological reality spoken about in Revelation 20:2: “And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.”

42. William N. Wilder argues that God’s goal for Adam and Eve was always for them to enjoy both wisdom and kingship (“Illumination and Investiture: The Royal Significance of the Tree of Wisdom in Genesis 3,” *WTJ* 68, 1 [2006]: 51–69). Their nakedness was a sign of immaturity that would have been replaced with investiture had they grown in the way and time that the Lord intended. This raises the possibility that the tree of the knowledge related to good and evil was a temporary prohibition and that the first couple would have had freedom to enjoy its fruit once they came of age. (A challenge here is that Genesis 2:17 uses **אֶלֶף** + *yiqtol*, which usually expresses permanent prohibitions [see “The Nonindicative *Yiqtol* and *Weyiqtol*” in chapter 5].) In this light, one wonders whether the prohibition against unclean foods would have been understood as equally temporary, with complete

In Paul's words, "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself. . . . Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats" (Rom. 14:14, 20; cf. 1 Cor. 8:7–13). And again, "Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim. 4:4).

What, then, was the love principle behind Leviticus 20:25–26? Within the original Old Testament context, the call to not eat unclean food identified that *love of neighbor means that the Israelites were to maintain a display of God's holy animosity toward sin and the curse even in their diet.*

3. Summarize the lasting significance of the law for today.

God is forever holy, and his holiness continues to affect the ethical obligations of his people: "Be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15–16). Peter here echoes the truth of Leviticus 20:26, and he later highlights that what the Lord commanded Israel is now being fulfilled in the church: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

From Genesis 3:15 forward, the reader of Scripture anticipates a male deliverer, a serpent-slayer, who would triumph through tribulation, restoring order and bringing life. Jesus fulfills the Old Testament's prohibitions against unclean foods in this way. The food laws captured a portrait of God's wrath against rebellion and of his animosity against the works of Satan. Clean foods certainly pointed to the cleanness that Christ would win for all in him (John 13:10; 15:3; Heb. 10:22), but the unclean foods, too, were part of the shadow for which Christ is the substance (Col. 2:16–17; Heb. 10:1). The unclean was part of the curse that Christ bore at the cross, bearing the shame and guilt of all that is hostile to God (Gal. 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24). In Jesus, every promise is already "Yes" (2 Cor. 1:20), the new creation is already initiated (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), and the new covenant is already enacted (Heb. 8:6), rendering the old covenant already obsolete (8:13; 10:9; cf. Gal. 3:23–26). Many who were once enemies have now been "reconciled to God by the death of his Son," and these same ones "shall be saved by his life" (Rom. 5:10).

Significantly, the New Testament teaches that the purity that Christ has secured for believers should bear fruits of love for one another (1 Peter 1:22). As we consider what love of neighbor means today with respect to food, we must view it from two angles. First, love of neighbor means that those who are strong in faith, having full freedom in their consciences to eat and drink anything, must be careful not to judge or to cause to stumble those believers who are weaker in faith and who choose to abstain from eating certain things:

One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. . . . Let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather

freedom to eat all foods after YHWH's "son" (Ex. 4:22–23) came of age, no longer being "under a guardian" or "enslaved to the elementary principles of the world" (Gal. 3:23–4:7).

decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. (Rom. 14:2, 13–15)

Second, love of neighbor means that we will *not* stop proclaiming that Christ has triumphed on our behalf, opening the door for all peoples to stand reconciled to him. One way in which we can do this is by eating the foods that God once prohibited. Just as Old Testament believers *abstained* from these foods in order to proclaim and mirror God's holiness, so also New Testament believers *partake* of them for the same purpose—"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Within this framework, *bacon is victory food*!

Christians can now enjoy food that was once unclean as a testimony that Christ has defeated the serpent and with that the curse. The cultural distinctions that set Israel apart from the nations are now abolished. We still await the consummation when "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom. 16:20). Nevertheless, the eschatological shift from the old age of death to the new age of life has *already* begun, and the war against the serpent is decisively over. This means that we can rest in confidence, awaiting the day when the unclean will be fully cast out and the evidence of the curse will be no more (Rev. 21:27; 22:3).⁴³

43. For centuries, many Jewish believers who cherish Christ (i.e., messianic Jews) have chosen to follow the clean-unclean food distinctions as a matter of Jewish cultural identity, recognizing this as a free choice and not an obligation. Paul would have been fine with this practice, especially when driven by a heart to win more Jews to Jesus (1 Cor. 9:20; cf. Acts 16:3 vs. Gal. 2:3). Yet a growing number of professing Christians in what some term the Hebrew Roots Movement claim that faithful Christians *ought* to follow the Old Testament law as much as is possible without the temple, including the keeping of the various holy days and food regulations. Like the Judaizers in Galatia who sought to "submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1), these folks "*require* abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim. 4:3). Paul said that such teachers would arise "in later times," and he also characterized them as departing "from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons" (4:1–2). Whether dealing with food (Gal. 2:11–14), the observance of holy days (4:10), or circumcision (5:2), all who *require* following the Old Testament law as though Christ had not changed everything "are severed from Christ" and "have fallen away from grace" (5:4). What matters today is faith in Christ working through love (5:6). We cannot keep the whole law (5:3; cf. Acts 15:10), so we must trust Christ, who fulfilled the law on behalf of his elect (Rom. 5:18; 8:4) and who fulfills the law through us by his Spirit as we live a life of love (Gal. 5:14; Rom. 2:26–29; 13:8–10).