

The Mosaic Ten Commandments Compared to Their Restatements in the New Testament

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Is the Christian under the Ten Commandments? Those who answer this question in the affirmative point out that all of the Ten Commandments except the fourth, are restated in the New Testament and therefore must apply to the Christian. But this position involves the false assumption that the moral law of God is identical with the Ten Commandments. The moral law is the basis of the Mosaic law, but the two should not be confused. Christians and all of God's intelligent creatures are under His eternal moral law, but only Israel was ever under the Mosaic pattern of the moral law (Deut. 6:4-6).

The simplest way to demonstrate this conclusion is to examine the Mosaic Ten Commandments and compare them with their restatement in the epistles of the New Testament:

1. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). The penalty for violation of this law was death. "He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed" (Ex. 22:20; cf. Deut. 6:13-15).

This commandment is not repeated in the New Testament but the principle involved is emphatically affirmed. "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). See also Acts 14:15 and James 2:19. But nowhere in the New Testament is the Mosaic penalty of physical death for violation of this law either affirmed or implied. Therefore, the first commandment as Mosaic law has been annulled but the moral principle that only the true God should be worshipped and served abides forever.

2. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Ex. 20:4).

The penalty for violation of the second commandment was death (Deut. 27:15). After the sin of worshipping the golden

calf the nation was saved from death by the intercession of Moses, but three thousand were slain who refused to give up their idolatry (Ex. 32:26-28).

The principle behind this commandment reappears in many New Testament passages (Acts 15:29; 1 Cor. 8:1-10; 12:2; 2 Cor. 6:16). John's admonition, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21), is not so much a warning against actual idols as against anything less than full understanding and appropriation of the believer's blessings in Christ (1 John 5:20). In this broader sense, anything that comes between the believer and Christ is an idol. But the Mosaic death penalty for violation of the second commandment does not appear in the New Testament. Therefore, the law of Moses against idolatry has been canceled, but the principle behind this law is retained and greatly expanded.

3. "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Ex. 20:7).

The Mosaic penalty for transgression of this law is stated as follows: "And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD shall be put to death" (Lev. 24:15-16).

In the New Testament the principle of the third commandment is expanded to include simplicity and godliness in all conversation (Matt. 6:33-37; James 5:12), but there is no parallel for the Old Testament death penalty. It must be concluded that the third Mosaic law has been done away but it must be recognized that the principle upon which it was based is as timeless as the holiness of God.

4. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8).

The Jewish Sabbath was the last day of the week or Saturday. The fourth commandment is nowhere reaffirmed as binding for the new age of grace. As a matter of fact the Jewish Sabbath is specifically mentioned as one of the ordinances which is blotted out by the cross (Col. 2:14-17). The

principle that one day out of seven belongs in a special way to God is re-embodied in the Christian's observance of the first day of the week as the Lord's day. No specific instruction instituted this new day, but its observance seems to have arisen spontaneously in honor and recognition of the resurrection of Christ. The claim of the Seventh Day Adventists that the pope changed the day from Saturday to Sunday in A.D. 321 will not bear serious investigation. There was no pope in A.D. 321 and history shows that Christians observed the first day from apostolic times.

The penalty for violation of the Mosaic Sabbath law was death. The man found gathering sticks on the Sabbath day was stoned to death by the explicit instruction of the Lord (Num. 15:32-36). Those who think they are under the Mosaic Sabbath law should realize the awfulness of their position. To maintain that the Sabbath law abides but its penalties are canceled is an untenable position. The passage which teaches redemption from the curse of the law explains that this is accomplished by deliverance from the law itself (Gal. 3:10-25).

Writers who speak of the Mosaic Ten Commandments as the "inexorable law of God" are embarrassed to find themselves in agreement with the Seventh Day Adventist position. When this is discovered, they try to extricate themselves with the historical argument alone to justify observance of the first day of the week. This leaves the Adventists with the best of the debate. How much better it is to recognize the clear teaching of Scripture that the Mosaic law was a temporary institution "added" to the Abrahamic covenant "till" the seed should come (Gal. 3:17-19). Now all of the law is done away, but its moral principle that part of man's time should be specially set apart for the worship and service of God is perpetuated in the observance of the first day of the week. Neither the Jewish Sabbath nor the Lord's day were ever intended to detract from the broader moral truth that all of the believer's time and service belong to God (Rom. 12:1-2).

5. "Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Ex. 20:12). The penalty for the overt violation of the fifth

commandment was death. "And he that smiteth his father or his mother, shall be surely put to death" (Ex. 21:15). "And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death" (Ex. 21:17). "Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother" (Deut. 27:16a). The rebellious son, who refused all correction, was to be stoned to death by the elders of the city (Deut. 21:18-21).

In his argument with the Pharisees Christ upheld this law with its full Mosaic penalty. "But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honor thy father and mother: and, he that curseth father or mother, let him die the death" (Matt. 15:3-4). Christ lived under the Mosaic law and upheld its authority. Many overlook the fact that the age of the Mosaic law ended only with the death of Christ (Col. 2:14), not with his birth or during his ministry. Some point triumphantly to the restatement of the fifth commandment in Ephesians as conclusive proof that the Mosaic law is still binding. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:1-3). It is significant that they overlook our Lord's reference to this command in Matthew 15. Why? Doubtless because Christ recognized that this law as Mosaic legislation could not be separated from its death penalty. But in Ephesians the penalty is omitted and nowhere is it reinstated for this age of grace. It should also be noted that the promise of long life in the land of Palestine as a reward for obedience is changed to a promise of long life on the earth—thus making the reward of universal application for the new age.

It is thus evident that the fifth commandment, as Mosaic legislation, has been canceled, but its moral principle is emphatically reaffirmed under grace and belongs to every dispensation.

6. "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex. 20:13). The Mosaic penalty for murder was death. "He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death" (Ex. 21:12). However, the Mosaic law distinguished between manslaughter and murder by providing mercy for manslaughter in the cities of refuge (Num.

35). But careless manslaughter was punishable by death. If and ox killed a man and it was known that the ox was dangerous and safeguards had been neglected, the owner was to be put to death (Ex. 21:29).

The death penalty for murder was instituted long before the time of Moses (Gen. 9:5-6). The sinfulness of murder is not only recognized in the New Testament, but it is declared that hatred is incipient murder. "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (John 3:15).

That the Christian is not under Mosaic legislation concerning murder and manslaughter involves no more problems or antinomianism than the evident truth that the citizen of Michigan is not under the laws against homicide of the State of Illinois. This is far from a theoretical distinction since Illinois has capital punishment and Michigan does not.

7. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14). Death was the Mosaic penalty for both parties involved in violation of this command. "And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death" (Lev. 20:10).

Long before the time of Moses the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed for wholesale violation of the moral principle of this law. Christ taught that lustful desire was incipient adultery: "Ye have heard it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28).

Surely no one would argue that we are under Mosaic legislation regarding adultery. In contrast to the Mosaic death penalty, modern churches debate whether or not the adulterer should be elected to church membership and even to hold church offices.

Under grace the moral law of God against adultery, and all forms of impurity, is enforced—not by appeal to a death sentence, but by reminding the believer that he is united to Christ and indwelt by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 6:9-20). That

this is not the same as Mosaic law should be self-evident.

8. "Thou shalt not steal" (Ex. 20:15). For stealing an ox or a sheep the penalties were respectively fivefold and fourfold restoration (Ex. 22:1). For stealing a man, or kidnapping, the penalty of the Mosaic law was death: "And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death" (Ex. 21:16).

In the New Testament the moral law against larceny appears in a beautiful framework of grace: "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28). The convert, who was formerly a thief, is to work at legitimate labor in order to have something to give to the needy, and thus lessen the temptation of the poor to steal. As transformed in the New Testament, the negative law against stealing becomes a gracious principle of Christian stewardship. The Christian is stealing if he is not a good giver. Surely it can be recognized that this is not Mosaic legislation.

9. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor" (Ex. 20:16). The Mosaic penalties for false witnessing are stated thus: "If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong . . . then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you. . . . And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deut. 18:16, 19, 21). Thus the ninth commandment was to be enforced by exact and severe penalties.

The moral principle of this commandment reappears in the New Testament in an entirely different setting: "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:9-10). Here the appeal for honesty is not based upon the fear of penalty, but upon the incongruity of doing anything so unbecoming to the believer's new nature in Christ. This is not Mosaic law but an example of what it means to be "inlawed to Christ," which is the literal meaning of "under the law to Christ" in 1 Corinthians 9:21.

10. "Thou shalt not covet" (Ex. 20:17a). For obvious reasons the Mosaic law states no penalty for covetousness in thought only. However, if covetousness found expression in stealing, adultery, or other sins, the Mosaic penalty for the particular sin was applied. Thus death could be the indirect penalty for some manifestations of covetousness.

The moral principle of the tenth commandment reappears in the New Testament in a setting of grace: "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints" (Eph. 5:3). The appeal for separation from all sin, including covetousness, is based upon the character of the saints; not upon fear of the law.

The death penalty seems to be mandatory for violation of the first three commandments. The penalty could be death for certain overt violations of each of the remaining seven commandments. No wonder the Apostle Paul calls the Mosaic Ten Commandments "the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones" (2 Cor. 3:7).

In conclusion, it has been noted that none of the Ten Commandments reappear in the New Testament for this age of grace as Mosaic legislation. All of the moral principles of the ten laws do reappear in the New Testament in a framework of grace. The Christian is not under "the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones," but he is under all the moral principles of those stones restated for this economy of grace. He is under the eternal moral law of God which demands far more than the Ten Commandments. It calls for nothing less than conformity to the character of God. This is as far from antinomianism as heaven is above the earth.

As a motorist enters a certain residential section of Detroit he sees this sign: "Good citizens drive twenty-five miles per hour." This is different from the usual traffic warning which is something like the following: "Speed limit, 30 miles, radar controlled." The first is a gracious suggestion while the second is law. The eternal moral laws of God were embodied in a code of legislation by Moses with fitting penalties for every violation. Under grace the same moral principles appear but in a setting of grace that might be paraphrased as follows: "Good citizens of heaven live by the manners of heaven."

This is almost exactly what Paul says: "Brethren, be ye imitators together of me, and mark them that so walk even as ye have us for an example. For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:17, 20, ASV).

The believer is not under the Ten Commandments, "the ministration of death," which the children of Israel "could not endure" (2 Cor. 3:7; Heb. 12:20). Therefore, "let us have (hold fast to) grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28b).

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