

BIBLICAL ETHICS

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Vol. III, No. 2

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February, 1980

Old and New Testament Views of God's Law

(Part II)

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[Continuity Between the Testaments, continued]

It is evident that what the Old Testament said about the law of God is also what the New Testament says about the law of God. The Old Testament said that God's law is perpetual in its principles, thorough in its extent, and complementary to salvation by grace. The New Testament teaches the same things about God's law. Such continuity between the testaments extends further to the teaching that:

IV. God's law is central to His one covenant of grace.

(A) The law can epitomize or stand for the covenant itself.

We read in Genesis 17:10, 14 that circumcision could represent the very covenant itself that God made with Abraham. In like manner, the stipulations of the Mosaic law could be used to stand for the covenant itself, as in Exodus 24:3-8 (cf. Heb. 9:19-20). Just as circumcision is the covenant, so also is the law God's covenant. This is why the tables of law and commandment which God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:1-2) can actually be called "the tables of the covenant" (Deut. 9:9, 11, 15). Accordingly, when Jeremiah speaks of the New Covenant which is to come, he indicates that the law of God is central to its provisions: "I will put my laws into their mind, and on their heart will I write them" (Jer. 31:33). This is quoted when the New Testament reflects upon the character of the New Covenant (Heb. 8:10), using these words as a summary for the whole (Heb. 10:16). Concern for the covenant, then, entails concern for the law of God in both Old and New testaments.

(B) The law given through Moses served the Abraham-it covenant of promise, rather than being antithetical to it.

According to the Old Testament, it is precisely as the God of Abraham and it is just because of the covenant made with Abraham that God dealt with Moses in a covenantal fashion (Ex. 2:24; 3:6). The exodus or deliverance granted to the Israelites through Moses was a realization of the promise made to Abraham (Ex. 6:1-8). God had promised in the Abrahamic covenant to be a God to Abraham and his seed, who would become God's people (Gen. 17:7-8). This same blessing was held forth in God's deliverance through Moses (Ex. 6:7). In particular, this Abrahamic promise would be the reward for conformity to the Mosaic law "If

you walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them, . . . I will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev. 26:3, 12). The Old Testament did not recognize an antagonism between the Abrahamic covenant of promise and the Mosaic covenant of law. Neither does the New Testament. Paul reflects with inspired accuracy on the relationship between the Abrahamic promise and the Mosaic law (cf. Gal. 3:17) and asks, "Is the law then against the promises of God?" His answer is decisive: "May it never be!" (Gal. 3:21). The law rather served to bring about the fulfillment of the promise made with Abraham (Gal. 3:19, 22, 29). The Mosaic law which established the commonwealth of Israel at Sinai is deemed by Paul as one of "the covenants of the promise" (Eph. 2:12). Throughout Scripture the law is congruent with the promise.

(C) Likewise, the Abrahamic promise which is realized in Christ serves the purposes of the Mosaic law.

The Old Testament perspective was that the people who enjoyed the promise ought to obey the law of God. It was expected that when Israel received what "the God of your fathers has promised unto you," the people would "keep all his statutes and his commandments" as revealed by Moses (Deut. 6:1-3). Likewise the New Testament sees those who belong to Christ—the one to whom Abraham's promise was given (Gal. 3:16)—as the seed of Abraham and heirs according to promise (Gal. 3:7, 29). They receive the promise by faith and thus should not desire to be under the law as a way of justification lest they fall from grace (Gal. 3:2, 6-14, 24-26; 4:21; 5:4). However those who enjoy the Abrahamic promise in Christ do so by a faith working through love (Gal. 5:6), which is to say a faith that obeys the law (Gal. 5:13-14)—a faith that walks by the Spirit and thereby does not violate the law (Gal. 5:16-23), God's Son of promise makes us to walk after the Spirit so that we keep the ordinance of the law (Rom. 8:3-4). Therefore, we observe that the promise serves the law, even as the law serves the promise, and this reciprocal relation is revealed in both the Old and New Testaments alike. The law plays an integral role throughout God's one covenant of grace.

V. God's law is taken by His people as a redemptive token and delight.

The preceding discussion of the law of God has focused on its objective character and function. It is im-

portant that we also take note of the subjective attitude which is expressed toward the law of God in both Old and New Testaments. The negative polemic against the law which is often heard today cannot be squared with the feeling and evaluation of the inspired biblical writers. According to them:

(A) Obedience to the law is their token of redemption, proof of their love, and sign of their dedication to the Lord.

The Old Testament taught that the very meaning of God's law and obedience to it was that God had delivered His people (Deut. 6:20-25; e.g., 5:15). Indeed not keeping the commandments of God was identified as forgetting one's redemption (Deut. 8:11-17), and it was clear that salvation was far from those who did not desire God's statutes (Ps. 119: 155). Similarly in the New Testament, where life eternal is to "know Christ" (John 17:3), we indicate that "we know him if we keep his commandments," and it is a lie to say that one knows Christ who does not keep his commandments (1 John 2:3-4). The Old Testament said that those who loved the Lord would obey His commandments (Deut. 10:12-13), and New Testament love for the Lord is proved in the same way (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3). Dedication to God and His purposes was signaled in the Old Testament by adherence to God's law (Deut. 26:17; Joshua 22:5). Things are not different in the New Testament, where those who choose to follow Christ rather than the beast are identified as "those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 12:17; 14:12). In either Old or New Testament it would be unthinkable for a redeemed saint, who loved the Lord and was dedicated

to Him, to spurn, criticize, or disobey the law of God.

(B) God's law was to be loved as a delight and blessing.

Although men may scoff, the delight of the godly man is found in the law of the Lord (Ps. 1:2; 119:16); that man is happy, said the Old Testament, who greatly delighted in God's law (Ps. 112:1). Paul's New Testament viewpoint was identical: "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). To John the law of God was such a joy that he could declare, "His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3b). It is sin—that is, violation of God's covenant law in both testaments (Joshua 7:11; Isa. 24:5; 1 John 3:4)—that is detested by God's people, for it brings death (Rom. 6:23). Apart from man's sinful inability, the law itself is ordained rather unto life (Lev. 18:5; Neh. 9:29; Ezek. 20:11, 13, 21; cf. Prov. 3:7-8). It is not the Old Testament only that recognizes this fact. Paul discerns the connection between obedience to the law and life in the Spirit (Rom. 8:2-4, 6-7, 12-14) and confesses that, apart from his sinful corruption, the law is meant to communicate life (Rom. 7:10). Anything that is against the law's demands, then, is also against health-giving (sound) doctrine, according to 1 Timothy 1:8-10 (cf. 1 Tim. 6:3). God gave us His law for our good, and for that reason Old and New Testament writers rejoice in it. It is to our shame if we do not emulate their attitude.

(For further reading along these lines see *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, Craig Press, 1977. The book may be ordered from me for \$9.50 at 412 E. Quincy, Orange, CA 92667; include check and address.)

(to be continued)

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