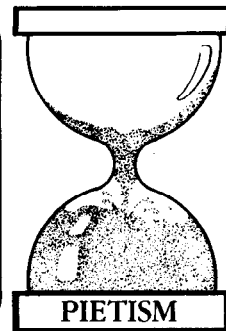


Dispensationalism in Transition

Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Code of Silence"



Vol. III, No. 5

©ICE, 1990

May, 1990

MUST GOD STUTTER?

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Pietism in Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism is unalterably opposed to God's Law as the standard of righteousness for the world today. Given its historical and theological relation to the pietistic movement and its compartmentalization of history, it could not be otherwise. Dispensationalists have been reared on antagonism to God's Law, as is evident from the following popular dispensational writings.

Alva McClain asserts that "the Word of God declares plainly that the Christian believer is not 'under the law'. . . . [T]he legalistic theology of our day affirms that the law is still in force over the Christian believer! What utter nonsense!"¹

The New Scofield Reference Bible comments that "crucifixion with Christ sets the believer free from the law."² "The believer is both dead to the law and redeemed from it, so that he is 'not under the law, but under grace' (Rom. 6:14). . . ."³

Hal Lindsey writes that "it is imperative that we realize that law and grace are complete systems in themselves. They are mutually exclusive. To mix these principles robs the law of its bona fide terror and grace of its creative freeness."⁴

Charles Ryrie comments: "Peter described the Law as an unbearable yoke. . . . In 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 Paul even specifies that the part of the Law which was written on stones (the Ten Commandments) was done away. . . . All the laws of the Mosaic code have been abolished because the code has."⁵

Warren Wiersbe: "With the death and resurrection of Christ, the Law was done away. . . . The Law has performed its purpose: the Saviour has come and the 'guardian' is no longer needed."⁶

The common response of the dispensationalist to the question of the Law today is a distorted appeal to Romans 6:14: "You are not under Law, but under grace,"⁷ despite the existence of Romans 3:31; 7:12; and 13:1-8. This misunderstanding has led to the dispensational interpretive principle: *If an Old Testament Law is not repeated in the New*

*Testament, it is not obligatory for the Christian.*⁸

Note Ryrie's comments:

"Specific Mosaic commands which are part of the Christian code appear there not as a continuation of part of the Mosaic Law, or in order to be observed in some deeper sense, but as specifically incorporated into that code, and as such they are binding on believers today. A particular law that was part of the Mosaic code is done away; the same law, if part of the law of Christ, is binding."⁹

The Chicken Comes Home to Roost

In January in Washington, D.C., a closed door discussion and debate was held among several Reconstructionists, dispensationalists, and other scholars of various persuasions at a Coalition on Revival sponsored gathering.¹⁰ Those representing the Reconstructionist viewpoint included Peter Leithart, Gary DeMar, David Chilton and Joseph Kickasola. The discussion-debate had to do with the application of "principles prescribed in the Bible" to the question of "reforming the structures of society—politics, education, economics" and "the nature of God's reign."¹¹ The role of God's Law was thoroughly discussed.

I heard of some of the statements made in the discussion by one of the dispensationalist theologians, who is a professor at a leading dispensationalist seminary.¹² These statements of position were so astonishing that I interviewed DeMar and Chilton in order to ascertain¹³ what was stated by this theologian. Even I was flabbergasted at the horrific, logical consistency of this dispensationalist. The following shows the danger of the God-must-stutter-to-be-believed hermeneutic (God's Law must be repeated in the New Testament to be valid).

Horsing Around

Professor X (I shall call him) was asked by Chilton whether we as Christians are in any sense under the Mosaic Law in the New Testament age. Professor X responded, "No."

Chilton then inquired, "But the New Testament quotes the Old Testament often, thus assuming its validity. How are we to account for that?" Professor X replied, "Okay,

1. Alva J. McClain, *Law and Grace* (Chicago: Moody, 1954), pp. 43, 48.

2. C. I. Scofield, ed., *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 1218-1219 (at Rom. 6:15).

3. *Ibid.*, p. 1268 (at Gal. 3:24).

4. Hal Lindsey, *Satan is Alive and Well On Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), p. 178.

5. Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1986), pp. 304, 305.

6. Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1989), 1:702, 703.

7. McClain, *Law and Grace* p. 48; *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1268 (at Gal. 3:24); Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody, 1969), p. 151.

8. See: Charles C. Ryrie, "The End of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1967), pp. 239-242.

9. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 305.

10. For a brief report see: Randy Frame, "Is Christ or Satan Ruler of This World?" (*Christianity Today*, March 5, 1990, pp. 42-44). Frame, no friend of Reconstructionism, omitted this interchange from his report.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

12. Discretion leads us to omit his name.

13. The quotations below are drawn from Chilton's memory.

what I mean is that the Law is not valid unless repeated in the New Testament."

Chilton replied, "What of a pastor who is involved in bestiality? Does his church have *biblical* grounds to dismiss him as pastor?" Then the chicken roosted so hard as to evolve by punctuated equilibrium into a rooster! Professor X answered, "No. The church would have no grounds to remove him." Chilton asked him if he really meant it. Professor X insisted that that was his position, because the NT does not condemn bestiality.

I want to make it clear that this was a tenured professor holding a doctorate at a leading dispensational seminary. This was no Hal Lindsey type. And although his statement (hopefully) would be dismissed by other dispensationalists, nevertheless, it still remains as an illustration of the *logical* tendencies inherent in consistent dispensationalism.¹⁴

God's Law or Chaos

As so dramatically evident in the above interchange, the Christian ethic of our era (our "dispensation" since Scofield!) is confused and disoriented. This is due to a variety of factors, such as: a widespread alien theology, dispensationalism; a Zionistic eschatology, premillennialism; and a faulty hermeneutic, Pharisaic literalism. One additional factor, which is perhaps a summation of these, is rooted in the whole idea of the Christian worldview and the Christian approach to culture, which requires a whole Word from God, including the first two-thirds of the Bible: the Old Testament, God's Law. The abiding validity of God's Law may summarily be demonstrated from the following angles based on the life of Christ. Unlike the Jews of old, we must not demand lawlessness by crying out, "Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas" (Luke 23:18b).

Jesus or Barabbas?

1. The Establishment of the New Covenant

Christ is the Mediator of the New Covenant, consequently we should be able to safely turn to Him for direction on the matter of the role of God's Law in the New Covenant era. He specifically declared the establishment of the New Covenant in His redemptive labor (Luke 22:20). It should be noted that the New Covenant specifically endorses God's Law as its ethical principle: "I will put *My law* within them, and on their heart I will write it" (Jer. 31:33). And the law of Moses is identified over and over again as the law of Jehovah.¹⁵

2. The Law and Christ's Redemptive Suffering

Still further, the very fact of the abiding validity of God's Law is dramatically illustrated in the death of Christ. The Law was of such abiding significance that God the Father could not do away with it to spare His own Son in bringing us our redemption. Christ had to suffer the full curse of the Law (Gal. 3:10; Col. 2:14). The Law could not be set aside.

3. The Teaching of Christ on the Law of God.

In Matthew 5:13-16 Christ calls His Church to the role

14. Professor X also argued that "there is no moral difference between capitalism and communism" and "Christians ought not to send their children to Christian schools." Without God's Law providing a holistic worldview, there is no objective criterion to judge the morality of economic systems or the necessity of Christian schooling.

15. For example, Deut. 30:10; Josh. 24:26; 2 Kings 10:31; 17:13; 21:8; 1 Chron. 22:12; 2 Chron. 6:16; 31:21; Ezra 7:6, 12, 14, 21; Neh. 8:8, 18; 9:3; 10:28, 29; Psa. 78:1; 81:4; 89:30; 119:34, 77, 92, 97, 109, 174; Isa. 1:10; Jer. 6:19; 9:13; 16:11; 26:4; 31:33; 44:10; 22:26; Dan. 6:5; Hos. 4:6.

of cultural significance. We are to be "salt" and "light" in the world. But these are general exhortations to holy living. The specific normative question remains: How may we properly be the salt of the earth and the light of the world?

The Lord Jesus Christ continues in Matthew 5:17: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets." What is it that He prohibits them from thinking? "Do not begin to think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets." The Greek word translated "abolish" is *kataluō*. It carries the force of "dismantle, disannul, abrogate." He specifically states that He has not come to abrogate the Law. He even sets the idea of the abrogation of God's Law in direct contrast with what He actually intends to do by use of the strong adversative *alla* ("but"). The strength of the contrast is evidenced in Matthew 10:34 where "peace" and "sword" are contrasted as opposites in the same way.

His intent is that the Law be "fulfilled." The Greek word here is based on the verb *plēraō*. Some have argued that this means to "live out the Law with a view to its being done with." But such a view sets forth a situation carrying the same effect as if He had said He had come to abolish or abrogate it!

Furthermore, the context here seems better to point to a subsidiary meaning of the verb: "to confirm," i. e. to confirm by filling it up to its full and original measure. The idea of "filling up" the Law fits well with the context which criticizes rabbinical and Pharisaical misinterpretations and dilutions of the Law through legalism (cp. vv. 19-20; see also Matt. 15:3-9; 23:23). This would also harmonize Paul and Jesus (Rom. 3:31).

Also we should note that verse 18 is given in explanation of verse 17: "until heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall not pass from the law." The "jot" is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet; the "tittle" is but a mere embellishment of a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. He emphatically repeats the ordinal "one" before both "jot" and "tittle." Thus, His point is to emphasize the continuance of the details of the Law of God. He is not instructing His hearers as to an abiding of the broad system, but as to the very details of the system. In addition, this detailed significance of the Law is re-emphasized in verse 19, where He denounces those who diminish the least of the commandments.

But what does He designate as the *terminus ad quem* of the Law? The Law will abide "until heaven and earth pass away." The Law will maintain perpetual validity as long as the heaven and the earth endure. In fact, to underscore this point He parallels it by restating it: "until heaven and earth pass away" becomes "until all is accomplished." The Greek of the second phrase indicates the *terminus* as when "all things come to pass," i. e., until the end of the created order.

Conclusion

If a leading theologian of the dispensational system cannot condemn bestiality on the basis of his own system, something is horribly wrong. But to say this may just be an expression of emotional repugnance widely held by relatively normal American citizens. Yet, what the problem really is goes beyond any natural distaste. The problem may be summarized in the principle: God's Law or chaos. Professor X is trapped in a chaotic ethical system. As the old saying goes, "Be kind to your web footed friends, for a duck may be somebody's mother" — or girlfriend (literally!).

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