



GOD'S INTENTION for THE MOSAIC LAW

What part does the Mosaic Law
play in the Church today?

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God's Intention for the Mosaic Law
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Foreword

But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted (1 Tim. 1:8-11).

The Basis of the Mosaic Law

Before we begin our study on the Mosaic Law and God's purpose for it, we must understand the background for the Law—God's holiness. Without an understanding of God's holiness, we cannot grasp the reason for the Law. Scripture reveals that God's holiness was the foundation for the Mosaic Law and that the Law was given to reveal His holiness.

God's Holiness: The Essence of the Law

When we think of God, we often think of His great love, and for good reason. It is amazing to consider God's overwhelming love toward us, a love without measure that will endure throughout eternity. And yet, there is another aspect of God's character that is just as great—His holiness.

Holiness carries the idea of distinctness and separation. God is infinitely perfect and distinct from all of creation. By His very nature, He is set apart from everything sinful and corrupt. Holiness is an essential part of His character, and His holiness is unique to Himself. 1 Samuel 2:2 says, "There is no one holy like the Lord. Indeed, there is no one besides You, nor is there any rock like our God."

God's holiness was revealed to the prophet Isaiah in a unique way. Isaiah received a vision in which he "saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple" (Is. 6:1). As God's beauty and majesty were displayed, the Seraphim called out, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory" (Is. 6:3).

God's Standard Is Holiness

As God's children, we are called to conform to His standard of holiness. Peter wrote in his first letter to Gentile Christians scattered throughout the world:

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy (1 Pet. 1:14-16).

Peter was quoting from Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; and 20:7; which demonstrate that whether these words were spoken to God's people, Israel, or the Church, His demand and requirement was and is that all His people be holy as He is holy.

The Law Reveals God's Holiness

God is perfectly holy; He is "Holy, Holy, Holy." Mere humans can never attain God's unique level of holiness. Still, He calls believers to be conformed to His image and to reflect His holiness. One of the purposes of the Mosaic Law was to reveal God's holiness and the lack of holiness in His people. The Jews were unable to achieve the level of holiness that God required through keeping the Law. The holiness that God demands is only possible because of His work of redemption on the cross.

The question we must consider now is: "What role does the Mosaic Law play in the Church today?" Controversy over this question raged in the Early Church and has continued to this day. Searching the Scriptures for the answer is crucial because when we passively tolerate unbiblical teaching in the Church, it soon becomes very difficult to stop the gangrene of false doctrine and ungodly living.

Believers Are to Contend Earnestly for the Faith

Immediately after the Church began, false teachers who had professed faith in Christ began infiltrating the Church. Jude wrote:

I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. Certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ (vv. 3-4).

The teaching and life-style of these false teachers was undermining the Truth. They were attempting to dilute the truth of God and turn grace into licentiousness. Jude was adamant that believers not take these threats to the Truth lightly and that they be intentional about defending their faith in the true gospel.

Peter's Warning

Peter's last letter was written in the shadow of his imminent death (see 2 Pet. 1:14). In this letter, Peter warned that the teaching of false prophets would even deny the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned (2 Pet. 2:1-2).

He warned that two things would happen. First, many would be deceived by these false teachers, and second, the presentation of the gospel would be destroyed as a result of their corruption of the Truth. Peter warned that these false teachers would introduce their destructive heresies in secret. Therefore, it was important for believers to be very attentive to any teaching contrary to the Truth and not allow it to pervade the Church.

Paul's Warning

Paul also warned about the destructiveness of false teaching when he wrote to the elders of the Ephesian church:

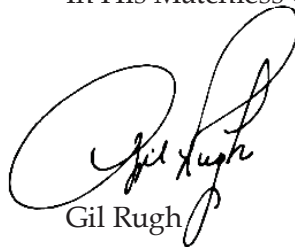
Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and *from among your own selves men will arise*, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert (Acts 20:29-31, emphasis mine).

Sadly, the very thing Paul warned these elders about in this passage had come to pass by the time he wrote his first letter to Timothy. False teachers had arisen, not only in the Church, but even among the Ephesian elders themselves. They had not taken Paul's initial warning seriously, and the consequences had been grave.

These false teachers wanted "to be teachers of the Law" (1 Tim. 1:7). The problem was that they didn't have any idea what they were talking about. They made confident assertions and spoke as though they really knew what they were saying, but they were speaking in ignorance. They wanted to wed the Law of Moses to the message of Christ. Their goal was to teach that salvation and sanctification involved faith in Christ *and* adherence to the Law.

That very same false teaching is making headway in the Church today. It is crucial that believers understand God's intention and purpose for the Mosaic Law, lest we too, be led astray. It is my sincere desire that the examination of Scripture on the following pages will provide insight into this controversial topic. May God bless and guide you as you endeavor to search out His intention for the Mosaic Law.

In His Matchless Grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gil Rugh". The signature is stylized with large, sweeping loops and a long, trailing flourish that extends downwards and to the right. Below the signature, the name "Gil Rugh" is printed in a simple, black, sans-serif font.

God's Intention for the Mosaic Law

“But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully” (1 Tim. 1:8). The Law reveals God’s character and His will. It is part of the inspired Word of God, all of which is God-breathed and profitable. There is nothing wrong with the Law itself. It’s the misuse of the Law that leads to problems. The Law is good, but it must be used lawfully—the way it was intended to be used.

The Mosaic Law Was Given to Israel

The most important thing to remember about the Mosaic Law is that it was an agreement between God and Israel—it was given to Israel, and only Israel. It was to govern the life and conduct of God’s people until the Messiah came, so it had a set duration.

The Law was never given to the Gentiles. When God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai, He said, “These are the words that you shall speak to the *sons of Israel*” (Ex. 19:6, emphasis mine).

Hundreds of years after Moses, the Prophet Ezekiel came on the scene. God said through Ezekiel:

So I took them [Israel] out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. I gave them my statutes and informed them of my ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live. Also I gave them My sabbaths to be *a sign between Me and them*, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them (Ezek. 20:10-12, emphasis mine).

This reaffirms that the Mosaic Law was given to govern the life and conduct of one specific earthly nation—Israel. The Law not only laid out judicial instructions, but also social responsibilities and reli-

gious guidelines for God's chosen people.

Five hundred years later, the Apostle Paul drew a contrast between the Jews who had the Mosaic Law and the Gentiles who did not have the Mosaic Law (see Rom. 10). Paul noted that even though the Gentiles did not have the Mosaic Law, they often did what the Mosaic Law demanded of Israel:

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves (Rom. 2:14).

Paul explained the reason Gentiles often behaved according to the Mosaic Law:

In that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them (v. 15).

When God created Adam and Eve, He made them in His image. As descendants of Adam and Eve, something of the moral character of God is stamped on our consciences. Even today when people want to remove all boundaries and let personal freedom rule, there are some things that everyone knows are wrong. For example, almost all people are opposed to incest. This is because God has stamped His nature on every human being.

People who have never walked through the door of a church or opened a Bible know the basics of moral conduct. They know that murder and stealing are wrong. They may not be able to tell you how they know, but they know. They know right from wrong because their consciences tell them. However, if people continue in sin, over time their consciences are corrupted. Once the conscience is seared, it doesn't speak so loudly against sin. Therefore, the conscience is not a perfect guide.

So the Gentiles are not without law, even though the Mosaic Law was not intended for them. Although it is true that Gentiles often abide by the principles of the Law because of their consciences, Scripture is nevertheless clear that the Law was given only to the Jews.

The Reasons for the Law

The Mosaic Law Revealed Sin

Paul wrote to the Romans: “through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). He explained that although sin existed in the world since the Fall, it was not charged as a specific violation of a command until the Law was instituted: “for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law” (5:13). The Mosaic Law also revealed the multiplicity of sin. “The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (v. 20). Paul later reiterated that the Law revealed sin:

What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “You shall not covet” (Rom. 7:7).

Paul stated in his letter to Timothy that the Law was for the unholly, not for those who were living righteously.

Law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholly and profane (1 Tim. 1:9).

If the Jews were a perfect people, they would not have needed the Law. The Mosaic Law reminded the Jews of their sin and their need for atonement. This constant reminder of sin was found in the daily offering of sacrifices. The Law commanded the priests to “make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel” (Lev. 16:16). The author of Hebrews makes it clear that although the Law could serve as a reminder of sin, it could never provide cleansing from that sin:

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sin? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb. 10:1-4).

The Law and its animal sacrifices were never meant to take away sin. As the priests went up to offer sacrifices, they did it with the knowledge that they still needed redemption from their sins. However, some Jews had corrupted the plan of God and thought that their physical sacrifices were sufficient to cleanse them from their sins.

The Mosaic Law Restrained Sin

The Law was not intended for righteous people, nor was it intended to restrict righteous behavior. We don't have laws today to restrict righteous people. The only reason we have laws against murder is because people murder. Our laws keep multiplying because people don't conduct themselves in the way they should. New laws have to be added every time people start doing something else that hurts society. Common sense isn't enough; we need laws to restrain bad behavior.

The Mosaic Law served a purpose for Israel; it restrained sin in the nation. That is the general purpose of all laws: to encourage compliance through the fear of punishment (see Deut. 6; 28:15-68). We have seen what happens in parts of the world where the law breaks down. When laws are not enforced, people are free to cheat and steal and kill without fear of punishment; and they often do.

The Mosaic Law Was Not a Means of Salvation or Sanctification

The Mosaic Law was never intended to provide salvation, and no one was ever saved through following the Mosaic Law. Paul drew a contrast between the Jews and the Gentiles. "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles" (Gal. 2:15). The Jews saw themselves as clean and superior to the unclean Gentiles who didn't keep the Law. That's why they didn't eat or associate with Gentiles. However, Paul clarified that following the Law could not save the Jews:

Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we [who are not sinners like the Gentiles] have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified (Gal. 2:16).

Although the Jews had the Law, a great revelation from God and a great honor and blessing, no Jews were ever saved by keeping the Law.

Just as the Law was not meant to save, neither was it meant to provide sanctification. Paul wrote to the believers he had led to the Lord in Galatia:

This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Gal. 3:2-3).

Paul pointed out that God had cleansed them from their sins and given them His Spirit through faith. It is the Holy Spirit's work in the lives of believers that produces growth and maturity. How could they grow and become the people God wanted them to be by keeping the Law when they had received the Spirit by faith? Paul wanted them to understand that not only was their salvation by faith, but also their ongoing sanctification. Justification, sanctification and glorification all come by faith; the Law was never meant to provide these blessings.

The Mosaic Law Was Given As a Tutor for Israel Until Christ

Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24).

The Law was given to keep Israel on track until the Messiah came. It functioned as a tutor or schoolmaster and revealed God and His holy character, as well as the righteous conduct required of His people. When the Messiah came, the Mosaic Law was no longer needed because its purpose had been fulfilled.

A number of commentators misuse this verse, claiming that people can't come to Christ if the Law is not preached. They say that the Law brings people to Christ, so it must be preached before the gospel can be presented. That is a misunderstanding of the context. Earlier in Galatians 3 we are told that the Law was added to the Abrahamic Covenant:

Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made (Gal. 3:19).

Israel already had the Abrahamic Covenant, which is an eternal covenant. The Mosaic Law was a later addition to that covenant—verse 17 says it came 430 years later—and it had a specific time limit. The Law

was only in effect until the seed, meaning Christ, would come.

Christ Fulfilled the Law

In ancient days, the tutor was responsible for the education, protection, and discipline of a child who had not yet reached adulthood. In a similar way, the Mosaic Law was given as a tutor to Israel for a specific period of time. The Law is no longer applicable because Christ fulfilled it. Paul makes this clear: "But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor" (Gal 3:25).

The timeline for the Law began with Moses at Mt. Sinai and came to a conclusion with the coming of the seed promised in the Abrahamic Covenant, which is Jesus Christ. We no longer need a tutor, because the Teacher Himself has come.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he explained that we are not under any aspect of the Law. "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14).

Paul explained how he became all things to all men, that he might identify with them and show them the way of salvation. He also revealed that although he was a Jew, he was not under the Mosaic Law. Instead he was under a superior law—the Law of Christ.

To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law (1 Cor. 9:20).

The Law & the Church

The early church included Jews and Gentiles who were made one in the Body of Christ. Almost immediately after it began, false teachers began to infiltrate the Church. They promoted two extremes of false teaching. One side taught that grace meant freedom to do whatever one pleased. These teachers claimed that there were no restrictions on a Christian's life.

The other side was made up of Judaizers. These false teachers professed faith in Christ, but had not genuinely been converted. They claimed they were going to enlighten the Church on the real meaning

of the Law and its role in their lives. They spoke convincingly and their use of the Law made sense. These false teachers were not denying the need to believe in Christ. They were merely teaching that submission to the Mosaic Law must be added to faith in Christ. This addition to the gospel didn't seem like a big deal, especially to Jews who were used to following the Law. However, Paul said that any gospel apart from the gospel of grace through faith in Christ was a completely different gospel that would not lead to salvation. It was not long before the Church was being corrupted by a mixture of grace and law and facing temptation to reject the true gospel.

This same type of false teaching is infiltrating the Church today. Some false teachers claim that the Mosaic Law must be reinstated and that this will ultimately usher in the Kingdom. This philosophy, often called post-millennialism or reconstructionalism, teaches that by following the Mosaic Law people will make the world a better place little by little, until eventually the Kingdom will be able to begin.

Still others claim that believers in Jesus Christ are the spiritual descendants of Abraham and therefore are under the Law. They believe that because the Jews were not faithful to the covenant, the covenantal promises have been transferred to Abraham's spiritual descendants and that the Church is the new Israel. They say that Israel rejected and crucified its Messiah, and in doing so, forfeited its position as God's chosen people.

However, the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants cannot be changed. The Abrahamic Covenant included specific promises to the descendants of Abraham that cannot be transferred to the Church. Galatians 3:15 says:

Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it.

The covenant that God made with Abraham and the nation of Israel cannot be changed. It was based on a promise by the One who cannot lie. Abraham was an inactive participant in the covenant; he was asleep when it was ratified (see Gen. 15). God took sole responsibility for the fulfillment of the covenant, and it was not dependent on Abraham or his descendants. Regardless of what the nation Israel did or didn't do, even crucifying the Messiah, the covenant stands.

God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants in Genesis

12 did make provision for Gentiles who would experience salvation through faith as Abraham did. In Genesis 12:3, God said to Abraham, "... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." However, the fact that Gentiles are included in the blessing doesn't mean that there is no future for the Jews or that the Gentiles have become the new Jews. God's unique promises to Abraham and the nation Israel still stand.

There are other problems with the Church's interpretation of the Law. It is common today to divide the Mosaic Law into three parts: moral, civil and ceremonial. Some teach that the Church is not under the civil laws which governed the political life of Israel or the ceremonial laws which governed animal sacrifices—believers are only required to follow the moral laws. However, *the Jews never made such distinctions*. For them the Law was the Law. Under the inspiration of the Spirit, James wrote: "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10).

If the Church was obligated to follow the Law—which it is not—believers would have to abide by every law or else be guilty of breaking the whole of the Mosaic Law. You cannot divide the Law into what you must obey and not obey. Either you obey it all or you are guilty of all.

If one could be saved by keeping the Law, then Christ died needlessly and God made the greatest mistake ever made. Paul affirmed that Jesus did not die in vain: "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly" (Gal. 2:21).

It is a tragedy that people think they are going to heaven because they keep the Law. Many people today think they are going to heaven because they try to keep the Ten Commandments, which are a summary of the Mosaic Law (see Ex. 20). But the Scripture is clear that no one can gain salvation by following the Law—not the Israelites in the Old Testament and certainly not believers today. Paul quoted Habakkuk (see Hab. 2:4) who lived 600 years before Christ when he wrote: "Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, the righteous man shall live by faith" (Gal. 3:11).

We Can Learn from the Mosaic Law

Reformed theologians say that dispensationalists (of which I am one) are antinomian. The Greek word for “law” is *nomos*, therefore, *antinomas*, or *antinomian*, means “against the Law.” They believe we live without laws or regulation and can do whatever we want. That is in no way true.

Christ has fulfilled the Mosaic Law, and it has served its purpose. We are not under the Mosaic Law in any way. However, that does not mean we can’t learn from the Law. Paul said that what was written in the Old Testament was for our instruction (see Rom. 15). In another letter, he wrote:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16).

The Mosaic Law reveals God’s moral character and His will. It reveals His standards for His people and what is offensive to Him. Through study of the Law, we can learn of God’s infinite holiness and perfection. We can also learn from the passages on animal sacrifices. For example, from the sin offering we learn that there is a penalty for sin, that we are under the judgment of a righteous God, and that we need an acceptable substitute—someone to take our place, to bear our penalty, to die on our behalf. Above all, the Law teaches us that we need a Savior. We need the Lamb of God to redeem us because the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin.

God’s Amazing Grace

The Mosaic Law was never intended to save anyone. God saves people today the same way He did in the Old Testament—through faith. It is only through faith in Christ that we can come into a right relationship with God. This mighty and holy God demands the same response from everyone, whether Jew or Gentile. Knowing that God has not changed His wonderful plan of salvation despite the passing of thousands of years should bring us great comfort. Paul wrote:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor

thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9, 10).

A lot of today's teaching excuses sin, even though Scripture clearly teaches that those who practice such things will not enter heaven. However, the glorious hope is the following verse:

Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11).

We don't need the Mosaic Law, and we can't be saved by trying our best to keep it. Forgiveness comes only by God's grace through faith in Christ. It is amazing to think that we, such vile sinners, can be washed, sanctified, and set apart for God to Himself. Through His amazing grace we are declared righteous in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of God.