

THE BELIEVER AND THE LAW
ROMANS 3:31

If you've ever been frustrated with other drivers on the road — people going too fast or too slow or weaving too much or not getting out of the way, here are some traffic laws that are sure to frustrate you even more!

These are some of the more [unusual driving laws](#) of the land:

- ✓ In Eureka, California, it is unlawful to sleep in any public space. In addition to park benches, the law also specifically excludes sleeping on any sidewalk, alley or STREET. They have to tell residents not to sleep in the street. And the offense, should you live to be penalized for it, is a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine up to \$1,000 and/or up to six months in jail.
- ✓ In South Berwick, Maine, you will be ticketed for parking in front of Dunkin' Donuts — specifically, the Dunkin Donuts on Main Street “to a point of 25 feet south.” The penalty is a fine of up to \$175 and/or jail time of up to 30 days.
- ✓ In Fort Thomas, Kentucky, it is illegal for your pet to “molest” a vehicle. Yes, that is the legal term used in the city ordinance for “animal-related nuisance.” The penalty is a fine of up to \$500.
- ✓ In Denver driving a black car on Sunday is prohibited throughout the city, and in Minneapolis, it is illegal to drive a red car on Lake Street at any time.
- ✓ In Arkansas, it's illegal to blow your car horn where ice-cold beverages or sandwiches are served after 9:00 p.m.
- ✓ In Hilton Head, South Carolina, it is illegal to store trash in your car. Specifically, the law says it's illegal “to place, leave, dump or permit to accumulate any garbage, rubbish or trash in any building, vehicle and their surrounding areas in the town so that the same shall or may afford food or harborage for rats.” A violation is consider a public nuisance and is subject to a fine of up to \$500 and/or jail time of up to 30 days.
- ✓ In Minnetonka, Minnesota, it is considered a public nuisance, and therefore illegal for “a truck or other vehicle whose wheels or tires deposit mud, dirt, sticky substances, litter or other material on any street or highway.” All violations of the Minnetonka code are subject to fines up to \$2,000.
- ✓ In Massachusetts, it's illegal to operate a motor vehicle with a gorilla in the back seat.
- ✓ In Oregon, it's illegal to leave a vehicle door open on the side of traffic, pedestrians or bicycles “for a period of time longer than necessary to load or unload passengers.” The penalty is a fine of \$90 and possible jail time.
- ✓ In Alabama, it's illegal to drive blindfolded.

I think when believers sometimes read the OT, particularly the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses that begin the OT), they sometimes feel like they are reading something just as silly. With so many laws related to temple worship and diet, it just seems that the OT and the Law of Moses are completely irrelevant.

How many times have you broken these laws this week?

- “Nevertheless, you are not to eat of these, among those which chew the cud, or among those which divide the hoof: the camel, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you...the pig, for though it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud, it is unclean to you. You shall not eat of their flesh nor touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you. “These you may eat, whatever is in the water: all that have fins and scales, those in the water, in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat. But whatever is in the seas and in the rivers that does not have fins and scales among all the teeming life of the water, and among all the living creatures that are in the water, they are detestable things to you, and they shall be abhorrent to you; you may not eat of their flesh, and their carcasses you shall detest. ‘Whatever in the water does not have fins and scales is abhorrent to you.” (Lev 11:4–12)
- “You are not to eat any blood, either of bird or animal, in any of your dwellings. Any person who eats any blood, even that person shall be cut off from his people.” (Lev 7:26–27)
- “You are to keep My statutes. You shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together.” (Lev 19:19)

So if you have eaten a pork chop or bacon this week, or if you’ve eaten shrimp, oysters, or scallops, and if your steak was anything less than solid gray well-done, and if you have worn a mixed blend article of clothing or planted tomatoes, onions, potatoes, and peach trees in the same garden area (as we have), you have violated the Law of Moses and you are rendered somewhere between unclean and a rebellious sinner.

And then there are the laws which seem to make no sense to us, like the prohibition in Dt. 14:21 — “...You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.” I can’t ever think of a good reason to boil any piece of meat, never mind meat boiled in milk. So why is that even there?

And those things all make us think, “the OT Law is just completely irrelevant. It’s of no use to us.” And then you come across a verse like Romans 3:31. After demonstrating the inability of the Law to save and affirming that salvation is only by faith, Paul says, “Do we then nullify the Law through faith?” And you and I fully expect him to say, “Of course — it’s completely irrelevant!” But instead he says, “May it never be! On the contrary, we *establish* the Law” (my emphasis). What? We establish the law? On what basis, and for what purpose?

That’s what we want to think about this morning.

THE MOSAIC LAW IS UNABLE TO SAVE ANYONE, BUT IT STILL HAS VALUE FOR THE BELIEVER TODAY.

Four realities about the Mosaic Law

1. What the Law COULD NOT Do for the OT Israelite
2. What the Law COULD Do for the OT Israelite
3. What the Law CANNOT DO for the NT Believer
4. What the Law CAN Do for the NT Believer

CONTEXT: Paul's question in Romans 3:31 might be a natural question for an opponent of justification by faith — "if Paul is right and the only way is to be justified is by faith, then let's just abolish the Mosaic Law."

- ✓ When Paul says **nullify the Law**, he uses a word that means "render inoperative," or "invalidate." They might even say, "Well let's just throw away the Law, if justification by faith is true!"
- ✓ And to that suggestion, Paul can hardly contain himself; he almost explodes with, **may it never be!**
- ✓ And rather than nullifying the Law, he says, **we establish the Law**. The word **establish** means to validate and uphold and maintain. He is saying that not only must the Law be retained, but it must be maintained and kept (in some way).
- ✓ This is a completely unexpected declaration from Paul. Rather than rendering the Law useless, Paul says the Law maintains value and force — even in the life of the justified believer.
- ✓ So how should we think about the Law of the OT, and particularly the Mosaic Law (Gen. – Dt.)?
- ✓ **[ASIDE: Law** is used in Scripture to refer to all of Scripture, to all the OT, to the Mosaic Law, or to the 10 commandments as representative of the Mosaic Law. Here Paul likely means Mosaic Law.]
- ✓ As we think about how we are to use the Law, we need to recognize first how the Law was to be used by the OT Israelites.

1. What the Law **COULD NOT** Do for the OT Israelite

- We need to be very clear that the OT Law could not save any Israelite or follower of God. The Law was never intended to be used as a means of salvation. It was utterly incapable of saving.
 - ✓ Obedience to the Law was incapable of saving anyone.
 - The Law was never set up as the means of salvation for sinners: Abraham was saved (Gen. 15:6, below) before the institution of the Law, and God promised salvation to the nation Israel herself before the Law was instituted (Ex. 6:6-7). And Israel exercised faith in God that resulted in salvation through the Passover event and God's action at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:30-31).
 - Even if one could keep the entire Law (and being in Adam that is impossible), the Law was still utterly incapable of saving anyone (Gal. 2:16; Rom. 3:20).
 - ✓ The sacrificial system was incapable of saving anyone.
 - **Leviticus 17:11** clarifies that atonement and forgiveness came through blood.
 - And while the blood of the animal was applied to the believer, it was only a temporary solution. The Israelites, because of limited revelation and understanding, likely didn't recognize that, but it is made clear in **Heb. 9:22-26; 10:10ff** that all the OT animal sacrifices looked forward to the One sacrifice of Christ who would redeem men through His blood.
 - The OT Law and sacrificial system could not save anyone. But Christ could — and did!

- Not only could the OT Law not save anyone, but salvation even in the OT was by God's grace through faith (in a coming Redeemer).

✓ **Genesis 15:6** — we will see more of this in Romans 4, but for now just notice that —

- God chose to bless Abraham with salvation and God's covenant apart from any work of Abraham (12:1-3).
- All Abraham did was exercise faith, and through that faith, God accounted (imputed) His righteousness to Abraham (cf. also Rom. 4:2, 5).

✓ **Habakkuk 2:4** — (which Paul also quotes in Rom. 1:17; cf. also Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38)

- In 1:1-4, Habakkuk is complaining about the ungodliness and wickedness of Israel.
- In 1:5-11, God says, "I know, I will send the Chaldeans to judge Israel" (vv. 6ff).
- Habakkuk responds, "The Chaldeans? How can you maintain your righteousness and use the Chaldeans to punish the Israelites since they are worse than Israel?" (vv. 13, 16-17).
- God responds by saying, "I am just and I will also judge the Chaldeans (2:2-20).
- The verse Paul quotes is 2:4 — the beginning of God's final response to Habakkuk:
 - ... The proud one (the Chaldeans, 1:10; 2:5) does not have a **right** (righteous) **soul**. In other words, God will judge the Chaldeans for their lack of righteousness (2:12-14ff).
 - ... 2:20 answers Habakkuk clearly — the Lord is holy and the nations (**all the earth**, so both Jew and Gentile) must be silent before Him (they have no cause for complaint).
 - ... So 2:4a means that those who live by pride in themselves will be judged and die because of their lack of righteousness. The one who is proud does not live by faith and does not have a right soul; he is empty inwardly and empty towards God.
 - ... In contrast to the Chaldeans who were judged by God, God then says in 2:4b, **but the righteous will live by his faith**. This is what Paul quotes in Rom. 1:17.
 - ... The message to Habakkuk is that God will not judge everyone; some will escape His judgment and live. And those who are alive are alive because of their faith in God.
 - ... This is the same kind of faith that Abraham evidenced — Gen. 15:6. Abraham and Habakkuk didn't know about Christ, but they believed that God would fulfill His promises to them and they trusted in Him for their salvation and justification.

✓ Numerous other OT passages affirm salvation by grace through faith:

- *Psa. 106:30-31 Then Phinehas stood up and interposed, And so the plague was stayed. And it was reckoned to him for righteousness, To all generations forever.*
- *Is. 45:25 "In the LORD all the offspring of Israel Will be justified and will glory."*
- *Is. 54:17 "No weapon that is formed against you will prosper; And every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, And their vindication is from Me," declares the LORD.*

- So the OT Law could not save the Israelite? What could the Law then do for the Israelite?

2. What the Law COULD Do for the OT Israelite

- The Law could do much for the Israelite — it was immensely valuable to God’s people. One writer has identified 10 specific benefits of the Law for Israel. And many others will come up with similar lists. For the sake of simplicity these benefits can be synthesized into three primary benefits.

- The Law could REVEAL the nature of God

- ✓ The law revealed the holiness of God (Lev. 19:2ff). Sixteen times God says, “I am the Lord.” Why should the Israelites obey His commands? Because He is the Lord and He is holy (cf. vv. 35-37).
 - If they are His people they will conduct themselves with holiness.
 - Since He is holy He will only call them to do what is good for them. It is to their benefit to obey!
- ✓ The law revealed the grace of God (Dt. 7:7-8; Ex. 19:5).
- ✓ There are two things particularly that every parent wants a child to know: 1) consequences for sin (and the wrath of God); 2) opportunity for forgiveness and redemption (the grace of God). The Law particularly reveals those attributes.

- The Law could REVEAL the nature of sin

- ✓ The OT law revealed the many kinds of things that were a sinful affront to God’s holiness. E.g., Lev. 18-20 reveal God’s standards for sexual behavior (18:1-24, an extensive way of affirming Gen. 2:24-25), idolatry (19:1-8), care for the needy (19:9-10), conduct in words (19:11-12), vengeance (19:17-18), human sacrifice and witchcraft (20:1-9), and far more! And Jesus demonstrates in Mt. 5:21-48 that these commands also relate to the inner condition of the heart. The Law exhaustively and repeatedly affirmed to the Israelite just how sinful he was. Like the sign I saw years ago in NYC — “Don’t even think about parking here,” the Law confronted the Jew with his utter sinfulness.
- ✓ In spite of all the prohibitions against many various sins, the list of sins is nowhere exhaustive; it is representative to demonstrate the kinds of things that are abhorrent to God (e.g., Lev. 19:14 only mentions the “deaf” and “blind,” but certainly would also include people who are lame or have mental disabilities. The Israelite couldn’t harm a crippled person and claim he was righteous (yet that was the very thing the Pharisees attempted to do).
- ✓ In conjunction with the revelation of sin, the Law also provided for the forgiveness of sin (Lev. 1-7, esp. 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7; Ps. 32:5-7).
- ✓ And the NT tells us that the Law was the “tutor” that God gave Israel until the time of Christ — it was God’s provision for the care of His people (Gal. 3:23-25). The Law supervised the people until Christ came, to tell the Israelite the kinds of things that please God. It was preparatory to Christ, governing his actions by external obligation until Christ would come and change men’s hearts (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezk. 36:24-28).

- The Law could **REGULATE** his relationship with God

- ✓ The OT Law is part of God's covenant with Israel. (Aside, "testament" as in, OT, is just another word for "covenant.") So when God established His covenant with Abraham and Israel, the Mosaic Law came alongside that covenant to dictate how the people of Israel would relate to the Lord. It was not a means of saving them (they already were His covenant people), but it was a means for God to say, "this is how My covenant people will live to please Me."
- ✓ We see that particularly when the Law is summarized for the second time by Moses in Dt. 28-30 — those chapters constitute the blessings and cursings the nation will experience when it obeys or disobeys. So they are Israel's story (not ours).
- ✓ What kinds of regulations did God give the nation?
 - God governed Israel as a theocracy (in contrast to a democracy or autocracy, a theocracy is to have God as one's ruler). The laws He gave were therefore not just about worship, but also civil in nature — how does one live as a good subject in God's kingly realm (**Ex. 19:6**)? The words God gave in the Law dictated Israel's conduct in the world as well as with God. And thus, "sin was a spiritual offense against God their Savior, but also a governmental offense against Him as their Ruler." [Strickland, *Five Views...*, 239.]
 - God regulated the kind of holiness necessary to fellowship with God (Pss. 15; 24:3-5).
 - God regulated the way the nation would worship Him (e.g., the Passover, Lev. 23:5-8). Given how often Israel became ensnared with idolatrous worship, she needed reminders of how to worship the Lord alone (cf. warning of **Lev. 26:30-34**).
 - God regulated conduct that would separate Israel from the nations (Ex. 31:13). Remember the command not to boil a goat in its mother's milk (**Dt. 14:21**)? This principle is what precipitated that Law. When Israel was about to enter the land of Canaan and take it for its own, they were susceptible to also assuming Canaan's worship rituals. And the Canaanites believed in "sympathetic magic" — that certain actions could influence the gods to act favorably (we'd call them superstitions). And boiling a kid in its mother's milk was thought to ensure the ongoing fertility of the flock. "Mixing animal breeds, seeds, or materials was thought to 'marry' them so as magically to produce 'offspring,' [and] agricultural bounty in the future. God could not and would not bless his people if they practiced such nonsense." [Fee & Stuart] God wanted His people to live like God-followers not idol-worshippers. This is akin to 1 Jn. 2:15ff for us.

3. What the Law **CANNOT DO** for the NT Believer

- Like the OT believer, the Law cannot save a sinner from the wrath of God. That's been Paul's primary point in Romans 1-3 (**1:18-19; 2:2; 2:3-5; 3:19-20**).
- The only means of salvation is by grace through faith (**Rom. 1:17; 3:24-26; 4:24-25; 5:1, 8-9; Eph. 2:8-10**).

4. What the Law CAN Do for the NT Believer

- The Law can REVEAL the nature of God

- ✓ If we read the OT and the Law we will know what God looks like in His holiness and grace (and more). Cf. **1 Pt. 1:15ff.**
- ✓ The Law revealed the manifold character of God for the Israelite, and in the same way it reveals His character to us.

“...the Mosaic laws, though not legally binding, comprise a treasure of insights and information regarding the very mind and ways of God and therefore, a priori, will be binding upon Christians in precisely the same sense as are all other portions of the OT, such as God’s messages to Israel in the prophetic books. If it is true that these stipulations are not our stipulations, it is equally true that they were issued by our God, who does not change. If the corpus was tailor-made for another people in another situation, it was tailor-made by the One we seek to know and serve.

“It is here that the point of profound applicability for the Christian is found. A law reflects the mind, the personality, the priorities, the values, the likes and dislikes of the lawgiver. Each law issued by God to ancient Israel (like each declaration by God through the prophets) reflects God’s mind and ways and is therefore a theological treasure. Moreover the theological insights we gain from a particular OT law will not only enhance our knowledge and understanding of God but will also have important practical implications for our own lives if we are patterning them after our heavenly Father and modifying our behavior and thinking in response to our knowledge of him and his ways...It is in this sense that every one of the 613 laws of Moses is binding upon the NT Christian.” [Dorsey, “The Law of Moses and the Christian: a Compromise.”]

- The Law can REVEAL the nature of sin

- ✓ The law reveals the *reality* of sin (**Rom. 5:20; 7:9**). This is a “good” use of the Law (**Rom. 7:12, 16**) — particularly for unbelievers (**1 Tim. 1:8-11**). And friend, if you are not a believer in Jesus Christ today, this is the best news you can have — you are a sinner through and through, but everything you could not obey from God’s Law, Christ did (**Mt. 5:17-20**), and He will impute His righteousness to you if you will only believe in Him.
- ✓ The law reveals the *sinfulness* of sin (**Rom. 7:7**). The Law exposes both the extent and depth of our sin; it reveals how many different kinds of things we will do to assert our “sovereignty” over God and that the problem with our sin is inside of us (**Jer. 17:9**).
- ✓ The law reveals the *guilt* and condemnation that result from sin (**Rom. 3:19; Gal. 3:19, 22; Col. 2:14**).
- ✓ The law reveals the *impossibility* of man to fulfill it (**Mt. 5:48**) and the necessity of the Redeemer to free us from the penalty and power of our sin.

- The Law can REGULATE his moral actions

- ✓ The OT Law did not cover every single circumstance of life. There were 615 codified laws — 365 prohibitions and 250 commands. But they couldn’t cover every possible circumstance.

- ✓ We have a corollary: our American legal system is so complicated in part because it attempts to regulate every single potential issue. Remember the law from Maine that I mentioned about not parking in front of Dunkin' Donuts? The reason is because it is right next to a school and the street was needed for a turn lane onto the school property and because people were ignoring the signs prohibiting parking there, they had to write a law to cover it. The heart is desperately wicked!
- ✓ So the OT law wasn't given to regulate every possible circumstance, but instead given to help people think in ways that honor and please the Lord. And the NT commands function in the same way and that's also the way we ought to think about the OT.
- ✓ So let's establish some principles for thinking about the Law:
 - *The Old Testament is not given to us to regulate our conduct.* We are freed from the Law (Rom. 6:14; 7:6).
 - ... The OT Law is part of God's covenant with Israel. It is Israel's story, not ours. As one writer says, that statement "can hardly be overemphasized." [Fee & Stuart]

"The Old Testament represents God's previous covenant with Israel made on Mount Sinai, which is one we are no longer obligated to keep....[it is not] binding on us. We should assume, in fact, that *none* of its stipulations (laws) are binding on us unless they are *renewed* in the new covenant....God expects of his people — us — somewhat different evidences of obedience and loyalty from those he expected from the Old Testament Israelites. The *loyalty* itself is still expected. It is *how* one shows this loyalty that has been changed in certain ways." [Fee & Stuart, *How To Read the Bible*....]

- ... On the other hand, the OT and its law are also *God's* story; and we not only benefit from it, but we *need* it if we will understand the nature of God and how He relates to His people.
- *The OT is given to instruct us and transform us:* 2 Timothy 3:16-17 means every word of the OT is applicable to us as it reveals the kind of conduct God loves (also, Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). The OT tells us the kind of life that is pleasing and displeasing to God. E.g., 1 Cor. 9:8-14 cites the law of not muzzling oxen and applies it to those who get their living from proclaiming the gospel. Paul's example is that there is more to the Law than what is seen on the surface and we need to examine the character and motives of God in declaring His Law. The Law gives us principles to teach us how to live honorably with God and one another.
- ... When reading the Bible, and particularly the OT, I regularly ask myself, "what does this passage teach me about the nature of God?" And that becomes an opportunity for worship.
- ... And when reading I also ask, "what is something I can do because of what I learn about God and myself in this passage?"
- ... Those questions help move me from meaning to application and to see that the OT really is relevant to where I live today — even all the Mosaic Law.

- *The NT believer is not freed from the laws of God.* But the law is simplified to the “law of love” (Gal. 5:14; Js. 2:8ff; Rom. 13:8-10). And included in the law of love are nine of the 10 commandments: e.g., Rom. 13:8-10. Do you want to know what it looks like to love your neighbor? Don’t commit adultery or murder against him and don’t covet anything that belongs to him. And the implication would also be, “do things that promote the strength of his marriage and the length of his life, and rejoice in all his successes.” So the Law has helped us define what it means to love another person.
- The believer *is* placed in bondage to Christ and that bondage produces a freedom from sin that the Law could never accomplish (8:3).

• **How do we use the OT Law?** [Taken from Dorsey, “The Law of Moses and the Christian” and Fee and Stuart.]

- ✓ Remind yourself, “This law is not my law and I am not legally bound by it because it was one of the laws God issued to ancient Israel as part of His covenant with her.” The OT Law is God’s inspired word *for* me, but it is not His direct command *to* me.
- ✓ Determine the original meaning, significance, and purpose of the law. Why did God institute the law? What were His motives in giving the law and what was the law intended to accomplish?
- ✓ Determine the theological significance of the Law. What does this law reveal about God and His ways? What does the law reflect about God’s mind, personality, qualities, attitudes, priorities, values, concerns, likes and dislikes, and the kinds of attitudes and moral standards He desires for those who love Him? Look at the Law (or ritual) as a means of revealing the nature and character of God who gave that Law as a means of caring for His covenant people. And remember that the essence of the Law is repeated throughout the NT, beginning with Jesus (Mk. 12:30-31; Jn. 14:34-35).
- ✓ Determine the practical implications of the theological insights gained from this law for your own NT circumstances. E.g., how will you interpret and apply Lev. 19:9-10?
 - What is revealed about the character of God? He is compassionate toward the needy.
 - What was the intent of the Law? For the Israelite not to consume everything he owned in caring for his own needs/desires but to leave extra for those who might come by the field and were hungry and unable to provide for themselves. (Did some abuse the law by taking when they really didn’t need to take it? Probably. But the Israelite was still to leave the edges of the field un-harvested. How much? Enough...)
 - Is there a NT corollary? Yes — Eph. 4:28 — the Lord has given us resources to share, and when we share with liberality it is an indication that we are being sanctified.
 - How might we apply this? One friend, whenever he received a paycheck would not only give an appropriate amount to the church and other ministries, but he would hold back a certain amount that he would use for giving to the needy. So whenever he saw or heard of someone who had a physical need, he always had funds to contribute. That honors the moral implication of the OT law, while also recognizing that he is not enslaved to that law.

CONCLUSION:

Put everything together that we've said this morning and what was the function of the OT Law in Israel? It was revelatory and regulatory — to reveal the nature of God and man and regulate how man relates to God.

How does the OT Law relate to the NT believer? It is revelatory and regulatory. It reveals the nature of both God and man, and it provides a basis for the moral regulation of our lives — it shows us what it means to love God and man.

So we can also say with Paul — Yes, we are justified by faith, but we will never get rid of (*nullify*) the Law, rather, we establish the Law.

BENEDICTION: Ephesians 3:20-21