

Three Kinds of Law
Leviticus 20:22-26
12/9/2012

Every sermon on the Old Testament should be an advent sermon. Every sermon on the Old Testament should be pointing us forward through time to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the whole point of the Old Testament. Don't believe me? Well, let's take a look at a couple of key passages in the New Testament that tell us this. In John 5, Jesus is having one of His usual run-ins with the Jews. They thought that Jesus was breaking the Sabbath, and also blaspheming. So, Jesus sets out to defend Himself from these charges. In the last few verses of chapter 5, Jesus says these words: "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" This is an extraordinary claim on Jesus' part. Jesus is saying that if you look at the five books of Moses and don't see Jesus, then you do not believe Moses' writings. Jesus is saying that Moses wrote about Jesus. Wait just a minute, you might say! Those of us who have read Moses know for a fact that Jesus is never mentioned by name. How is it, then, that Jesus can claim that that is all Moses ever wrote about? Jesus can say this because Moses was writing the story that God told him to write. Moses was writing the story that had a climax in history in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Moses wrote the shadows and hints of what would later be known as the story of Jesus Christ. The same thing can be said from Luke's Gospel. In chapter 24, two disciples are on the road to Emmaus. Jesus appears to them (this is after His resurrection), only they don't recognize Jesus for Who He is. The disciples were sad and confused, because they did not understand what was happening. Jesus tells them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. The Greek language here cannot fully translate into English. Most English translations give the impression that Jesus picked and chose sections of the OT that pointed to Him. That is not what the Greek is saying. The Greek is saying that the entire OT is what Jesus expounded as being an arrow pointing straight to Jesus. All of the OT pointed to Jesus. There is no part of the OT that does not point to Jesus. This is confirmed in verse 32 when the disciples say that Jesus opened "the Scriptures" to them. The same language occurs later on in the same story, when Jesus says "All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. These two passages give us the single greatest key to understanding the Bible. What is it all about? It is all about Jesus. In these two passages, Jesus is telling us that if we read the Old Testament (knowing now how the story ends), and we don't see Jesus, we are missing the whole point! If any sermon or study on the OT fails to point us to Jesus Christ, it is not merely a failure in pointing out Christ, it is a failure period! If a sermon on the OT could have been preached in a synagogue, it is a failure, says Jesus. The reason I am hammering away at this is that seeing Jesus in the Old Testament is paramount in importance as we come before the law, and seek to understand it. The Law points us to Jesus. The Law is not merely some timeless truth: it is part of the great story that leads us straight to the cross and the empty tomb. Any interpretation of the law that skirts around Jesus is missing the whole point of the law. Any interpretation of a specific law that skirts around Jesus is missing the whole point of that particular law. Every individual law, and the law as a whole has a direction arrow on it: go to Jesus. As Paul would say, I resolve to preach only Christ, and Him crucified. Paul would never, ever have preached on the Old Testament without leading the listener to the feet of Jesus Christ. Paul himself never read the OT, never quoted the OT, without showing Christ from its pages. Neither did any of the other NT authors. This is absolutely fundamental to our understanding of OT law. It is the golden key that unlocks the entire Bible for us. As Augustine once said, "The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed."

In our passage in Leviticus, I want us to notice (and we're going to be looking at a few different passages) the most important point: the obedience to the dietary laws is here tied to the possession of the land. The land is mentioned in verse 22 as something that would vomit the people out if they do not keep the statutes and judgments. Verse 23 says that the nations which God is casting out have very different laws. But, as verse

24 says, God has separated the people of Israel from the other nations. Therefore, as verse 25 says, the people of Israel shall distinguish between clean and unclean animals. The separation between clean and unclean animals mirrors the distinction between God's people and the other nations. In fact, the command to separate clean and unclean is supposed to help the Israelites stay pure from the nations. Now, the distinction between clean and unclean animals is older than this law. Noah distinguished between clean and unclean animals even at the time of the Flood. At that time, however, it was not tied to a separation between God's people and the pagans. Here God ties it to the distinctiveness of God's people as an ethnic nation. That means that at some point in the future, God's people will not be just Israelites, but will instead include Gentiles. Then the laws that separate Jew from Gentile will change in meaning. This we will see from other Bible passages. For now, simply take notice that the distinction between clean and unclean has a built-in expiration date, as it is tied to the land, and to ethnic Israel.

The next passage we need to look at is Ephesians 2:11-22. In verses 14-17, Paul is talking about a wall of separation, or enmity, between Jew and Gentile. What is this wall? It is "the law of commandments contained in ordinances," as he says in verse 15. This language cannot be limited to circumcision, since it is plural, and must therefore refer to more than one particular law. Rather, it refers to everything in the law that separated Jew from Gentile, everything that told the Jew that he was different from the Gentile. Now, we know that the moral law did not separate Jew from Gentile, since the moral law is imprinted on every human heart. So, what separated Jew from Gentile was the collection of laws that showed Israel how different they were from Gentiles. Some examples would include the law that prevented Israelites from planting two different kinds of seed in the same field, or that prevented Israelite women from sewing clothes from cloth made of two different kinds of thread. The dietary laws of OT Israel would certainly be included as something that created a barrier between Jew and Gentile, as would circumcision. In other words, all the laws that separated Jew from Gentile are laws that Jesus abolished, as it says in verse 15. If anyone desires to follow those kinds of law today, they would be putting up a barrier that Jesus Christ Himself has taken down through His own death on the cross. At the cross, Jesus put to death the enmity (verse 16). That means that Jesus, by His death, took away the barriers between Jew and Gentile. Jesus changed the nature of the OT civil laws such that they do not apply in a divisive way again. If people want to put up that barrier again, they would be working against Jesus' own work on the cross. They would be opposing the very cross itself.

At this point, an objection comes to mind. What about what Jesus said? Didn't He say, "I came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill the law?" Yes, He did, and that is perfectly true. Paul does not mean that the OT laws no longer exist. He means that as they apply, they must apply in such a way that does NOT divide Jew from Gentile. All OT laws have a continuing application, even the ones that do not apply in the same way today. Let me repeat that statement: all OT laws have a continuing application, even the ones that do not apply in the same way today. Jesus did not come to get rid of the law. But Jesus' statement does not mean that the law is always the same, and always applies in the same way. Yes, the law is still there, recorded for us in the OT. That law still has much to teach us about holiness (though again, in a different way today than in the OT time). They are not "abolished" in the sense of eliminated. But they are abolished in this sense: they are no longer to be applied in the same way they were applied in the OT. Remember our very important key to the OT: all law points to Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ has made one new man out of what was previously two peoples: Jew and Gentile, then there cannot be a law in existence today that threatens to divide Jew from Gentile. That would be to go backwards in redemptive time. The time of redemption only moves in one direction: forward.

What about the OT feasts? They all pointed to Jesus Christ as well. I have a wonderful book by John Sittema called *Meeting Jesus at the Feast*. In this book, he systematically shows us how each OT feast was a shadow or type of what Jesus came to do and to be. Just the most obvious example is the day of atonement, known as "Yom Kippur." Two goats were taken, and one was sacrificed, and one was the "scapegoat." The scapegoat was the goat over which the priest confessed the sins of Israel, and then sent outside the camp. The point is that there are two problems with our sin: firstly, our sins need to be punished (and in the process satisfying God's wrath), and secondly, our sin needs to be taken away from us. The one goat was a symbol of punishment and satisfying God's wrath, the one that was slaughtered. The other goat was a symbol of taking

guilt away from us. The two goats were a shadow of what Christ would do. He fulfilled both aspects of the day of atonement. He was executed on a cross, which means that He was sacrificed in order to satisfy God's wrath, thereby taking the punishment that we so richly deserve. Furthermore, Jesus was crucified outside of Jerusalem, just like the goat was sent out into the wilderness. Jesus thus took our sin away from us. In theological terms, Jesus propitiated (or turned aside) God's wrath, and Jesus expiated (or took away) our sin. This is what the day of atonement means. If we were to celebrate Yom Kippur today, we would be denying what Jesus Christ has done. No, the way that Yom Kippur applies to us today is that it shows us in a vivid way just what Jesus did for us. Believing in Jesus Christ is therefore the way that we celebrate Yom Kippur. We could take a similar route through all the other OT feasts. They all foreshadowed Christ.

We have so far been addressing the civil law of Israel, the laws that applied directly to Israel as a nation separated from the Gentiles. What about the sacrifices? What about all the priestly laws? What about the tabernacle and the temple? The book of Hebrews is where we must turn for help in these matters. The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the great High Priest, and that He is the offering, and that He is the temple. In other words, everything about the OT sacrificial system points forward to Jesus Christ. Hebrews 8:1 tells us this: "Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens." In other words, no other priest is necessary. Furthermore, Jesus is the once for all sacrifice for sins, as Hebrews 9:13-14 tells us: "For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" And in John's Gospel, we learn that Jesus is the true temple when Jesus says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again." John's comment on it is that Jesus was talking about the temple of His own body. So, we learn then that Jesus is the great High Priest, He is the sacrifice, and He is the temple. Everything about the OT sacrifices points to Jesus, who fulfills it all. Again, we can see that reading about the OT sacrifices will help us to understand Christ. But Jesus being our High Priest changes the law. Look specifically at Hebrews 7 for a moment. Paul has been telling us about the change in priesthood from the order of Aaron to the order of Melchizedek. In that context, we find verse 12: "For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law." A what of the law? A *change* of the law. So, whatever Jesus meant by "not a jot or tittle passing away from law," He did not mean that there would never any change at all in the law. His very priesthood of necessity brought a *change* in the law! This is brought out even more clearly in verse 18: "For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God." What law is Paul talking about here? He is talking about the sacrificial system. What he is saying is that the sacrificial system had a built-in expiration date. It was created to be the shadow of what was coming. When the perfect (Jesus Christ!) came, then the imperfect no longer applied in the same way. Those laws are still recorded for us. They have not gone anywhere. But they apply to us differently now that the reality of Jesus Christ has come. They point us to Christ, and help us to appreciate all that Jesus has done for us.

One fascinating little tidbit I came across fairly recently has to do with Leviticus. Ever wonder why Leviticus is so hard to read? You come across all these rules for the sacrifices, and many of them are so repetitive, that it gets "boring." Well, maybe those laws are *supposed* to be boringly repetitive! What greater illustration could there be of the fact that these sacrifices had to be offered again and again, whereas Jesus offered one sacrifice, once for all? The blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin, but the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. Leviticus is supposed to be "boring!" Its very boringness is supposed to drive us to Christ. Therefore, do not shy away from reading Leviticus because of its repetition. Read Leviticus precisely to be bored by the repetition! And then allow that repetition to drive you to Christ! Then you will find that, underneath the repetition, is an all-consuming desire for holiness, and suddenly Leviticus is not ultimately boring any more!

So, we have seen that the civil laws of Israel and the sacrificial, or ceremonial laws of Israel have been fulfilled in Christ in such a way that they have been transformed, and no longer apply in the same way as they

did in the OT time.

We must briefly ask about the Ten Commandments. I say briefly, because we will have plenty of time, Lord-willing, to look at the Ten Commandments in the coming weeks. They are what we call the moral law. The moral law is that law which is implanted on every single human heart, as Paul says in Romans 1-2. See especially Romans 2:14-15: "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their heart." When Paul says they do not have the law, what he means by that is that it was not revealed to them on Mount Sinai, as it was revealed to the Israelites. But they still have the substance of that law written on their hearts. This, by the way, is another proof of the distinction between the moral law and the other kinds of law, which are certainly not written on the human heart. "You shall not murder" is something that everyone knows. "You shall not plant two different kinds of seed in one field" is not something that everyone knows. Jesus gave us illustrations of how we are to interpret the moral law in the Sermon on the Mount. Plainly, Jesus intends for us to understand that the moral law does not change. Jesus' interpretation of the Ten Commandments is not actually something new, but a fleshing out of what the OT also said about the Ten Commandments. This we will see more clearly as we go through the Ten Commandments.

So, what can we take away from all this? The greatest benefit we can take from this is instruction in how to read the OT. Now, here we must be careful. We have said that every law, as well as the law as a whole, points us to Jesus Christ. This is true. This is what Jesus Himself has said. However, that does not mean that every single detail of the OT has a direct arrow to Jesus. Rather, the story as a whole leads us to Christ. There are folks out there who will see Jesus in every single rock and blade of grass in the OT. This can get a bit absurd. We want to avoid that extreme, since it is not responsible interpretation. We need to remember that the OT is progressive in its revealing of Christ. What we mean by that is that the OT is like an acorn in Genesis, and grows up into a large tree by Malachi, though we still need the New Testament to tell us how to interpret this tree. The point is, not every stage of growth looks exactly like the tree full-grown, any more than a person when they grow up always looks exactly alike at every stage of growth. We change as we grow. So does the OT. It is a living organic revelation. If we keep these things in mind, we will see Christ in the OT where He is, and we will be able to interpret the law as Jesus would have interpreted the law. That will be a great blessing to us in our Christian walk.

Sermon Outline

I. Reading the Old Testament

II. Civil Law

- A. Tied to the Land in Leviticus 20
- B. Ephesians 2, a Change in the Law
- C. Objection From Matthew
- D. The Feasts

III. Ceremonial Law in Hebrews and Leviticus

- A. Hebrews
- B. Reading Leviticus

IV. Moral Law