

The Harmony of Law and Gospel (Part 3): Romans 3:31

Introduction: Please open your Bible to Romans 3:27-31.

Andy Stanley is a popular and influential pastor of a mega-church in the Atlanta area (North Point Community Church). About four years ago he preached a message in which he said some **disparaging things** about the Old Testament (April 30, 2018). His sermon was aimed at appealing to people who had left Christianity over something they disagreed with or didn't like in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. In that sermon he criticized the Old Testament for being "violent" and "disturbing." And he said that the OT "offends all of our modern senses."

He further said, "Many have lost faith because of something about the Bible or in the Bible, the Old Testament in particular."

How someone could lose faith because of what the Bible says makes no sense at all.

Perhaps the worst thing he said was that we, as Christians, must "unhitch" the Christian faith from the Old Testament. Dear people, that is heresy.

To put it mildly Andy Stanley has a **convoluted understanding** of the Bible including his understanding of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Must we unhitch the Christian faith from the Old Testament? May it never be!

As we have noted in recent weeks, one of the most difficult areas of Christian theology is understanding the precise relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. But basic to this discussion is the recognition that there is **significant harmony and continuity** between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

With that said let me give you **five points of continuity**:

1. From the Old Testament to the New Testament the character of God remains the same. The idea that God changes from the Old Testament to the New Testament from being more wrathful to more loving is a completely wrong way of understanding the Bible and the character of God. The character of God does not change. God is immutable. And so the God of the OT is the same as in the NT.

2. From the Old Testament to the New Testament salvation has always been by grace through faith. The idea that people in the Old Testament were saved by keeping the Law but are now in the New Testament saved by grace through faith is completely false. Salvation has always been by grace through faith as we will see in **Romans 4**.

3. The Old and New Testaments are equally inspired by God, equally inerrant, and are to be treated with equal reverence as the Word of God. The NT itself has a very high view of the OT. The NT affirms that the OT is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16). The OT is the very Word of God. The NT also affirms that the OT is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."

In speaking about the OT, the Apostle Paul says in **1 Cor. 10:11**, "Now these things happened to

them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”

Paul doesn't say that we must unhitch the OT from the Christian faith. He says that the OT was “written for our instruction.”

4. The Old and New Testaments share together a united central theme and storyline, namely the Kingdom of God that is centered and anchored in Jesus the Messiah (Michael Vlach). The Kingdom of God is a thread that runs from the first chapter in the Bible to the last chapter in the Bible (from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22).

5. There are approximately 350 quotations of and allusions to the Old Testament in the New Testament (Michael Vlach). The NT book with the highest number of OT quotations is the book of **Romans** (66). The NT as a whole and the book of **Romans** in particular are saturated with the OT. At least 10% of NT text is made up of quotes or allusions to the OT (Roger Nicole).

And so when we think about the relationship between the OT and the NT we must begin with the recognition that there is **significant harmony and continuity** between them. But we must also recognize that there is **some discontinuity** between the OT and the NT. And this morning we are continuing to look at just one facet of this discontinuity, that is **the relationship between the Mosaic Law and the Christian**.

The **question** we are asking is this: Does the Mosaic Law continue to be legally binding upon the people of God today in the era of the new covenant or has it discontinued?

Review: Now, we are addressing this subject in view of **Romans 3:31**. You will remember that in light of the doctrine of justification, the Apostle Paul **draws three very powerful conclusions** in **vv. 27-31** the first of which is...

- a. Humility (vv. 27-28): Justification humbles believers and excludes boasting.
- b. Unity (vv. 29-30): Justification unites believers and excludes discrimination.
- c. Honor (v. 31): Justification honors the Law and excludes antinomianism.

As we have learned, the doctrine of justification is **not opposed to or against** the Law of God. It does not **dishonor, undermine, or denigrate** the Law of God in any way. Instead, the doctrine of justification **establishes the Law** and it does so in at least **four ways**:

1. Witness: The doctrine of justification establishes the Law in that it was witnessed by the Law.
2. Conviction: The doctrine of justification establishes the Law in that it convicts of sin and prepares the way for salvation in Christ.
3. Satisfaction: The doctrine of justification establishes the Law in that it satisfies the requirements of the Law.
4. Obedience: The doctrine of justification establishes the Law in that it obligates us to obey the Law.

This led us to think about the **two main errors** when it comes to the relationship between the

Law and the gospel the first of which is...

1. Legalism (to confuse grace).

Legalism is the idea that you can be saved by keeping the Law. We repudiate legalism.

2. Antinomianism (to abuse grace).

Antinomianism is the idea that a person can be right with God and not obey God. We are not saved by our obedience to God, but we are saved to obey God. By the grace of God we have been freed from the power of sin and are now free to obey God because we love Him. We repudiate antinomianism.

But which commands are we to obey? Are we to obey the Law of Moses? Does the Mosaic Law continue to be legally binding upon the people of God today?

It is my conviction that the Bible teaches the answer is, “no.” In our last message, we looked at **three reasons** why Christians are not legally obligated to keep the Law of Moses:

1. The Law of Moses is an indivisible, unified Law that is fulfilled in Christ.

The Bible itself does not divide the Mosaic Law into parts, into civil, ceremonial, and moral categories so that some of it discontinues and some of it continues. The Law of Moses as a unit has been fulfilled by Christ, it has passed away, and thus it is not binding upon new covenant believers.

2. The new covenant has replaced the old covenant.

The Mosaic Law was built into the old covenant that God made with the nation of Israel on Mt. Sinai. You cannot separate the Mosaic Law from the old covenant. And since the new covenant has replaced the old covenant, the Mosaic Law has discontinued.

3. The New Testament’s direct statements on the discontinuance of the Mosaic Law.

- a. The discontinuance of circumcision (1 Cor. 7:17-20; Gal. 5:2-6; 6:12-15).
- b. The discontinuance of the Levitical priesthood and the sacrificial system (Hebrews).
- c. The discontinuance of the dietary restrictions (Mark 7:14-20; Acts 10:9-16; Rom. 14:1-4, 13-15, 20; Col. 2:16-17; 1 Tim. 4:1-5).
- d. The discontinuance of the holy days/Sabbaths/festivals (Rom. 14:5-6; Gal. 4:8-11; Col. 2:16-17).
- e. The discontinuance of the Law itself (Gal. 3:19).

That brings us now to a **fourth and final reason** why Christians are not legally obligated to keep the Law of Moses, because...

4. The Law of Moses has been replaced with the Law of Christ.

We left off last time in **1 Corinthians 7:18-19**.

I want to remind you how Paul distinguishes here between the Law of Moses and the Law of God. Now that Christ has come and has instituted the new covenant with His blood, we are no longer bound to be circumcised as the Law of Moses required. But notice how Paul says we are still under the Law of God. We are not bound to keep the Law of Moses but we are bound to keep the commandments of God. But exactly what are the commandments of God that we are supposed to keep?

For the answer let's turn to **1 Corinthians 9:19-23** (the Apostle Paul's missionary methodology).
1. In v. 19 Paul states the **general principle** of his missionary methodology.

What is Paul saying? Paul is saying that he adapted his lifestyle to different kinds of people (without sinning) in order to preach the gospel to them. Paul did not alter the gospel itself, but he did alter his lifestyle for the sake of evangelism. Paul was culturally flexible for the sake of the gospel.

2. This general principle is then **specifically applied** to Jews and Gentiles (**vv. 20-21**).

a. To the **Jews** (v. 20).

Paul was a Jew. And when he was among the Jews he adapted his lifestyle to the Jews in order to win them. But please notice that Paul specifically states that he is not under the Law (i.e. the Law of Moses). But when Paul was among the Jews he lived like he was under the Law in order to not cause unnecessary offence.

Paul didn't walk into the synagogue with a ham sandwich. That would be unnecessarily offensive and would have closed the door on the opportunity to preach the gospel. Paul was free to live a non-kosher life, but he was willing to accommodate himself to the Jews. For our purposes, what is most important here is Paul's direct, explicit statement that he is not under the Law of Moses.

Thomas Schreiner, "He [Paul] no longer lived under the authority of the Mosaic covenant, for that covenant had passed away now that Christ had come. Nevertheless, he willingly subjected himself to the law if he ministered to Jews in order to avoid giving offense."

Now, I want to show you that Paul makes the same point in **Romans**:

Romans 6:14-15

We are not under the Law. He says it twice. Notice that Paul doesn't say, we're not under the civil or ceremonial aspects of the Law but we remain under the moral aspect of the Law. No, he says we are not under the Law. Which parts? All of it.

Thomas Schreiner, "The phrase should be interpreted in terms of redemptive history. The old era of redemptive history refers to the time period when the Mosaic covenant was operative."

Paul is contrasting two periods of redemptive history: Before the coming of Christ, God's people lived in the period of the Mosaic Law but now we live in the period of grace.

Romans 10:4

Thomas Schreiner, "Christ is the goal to which the law points; and when the goal is reached, the law also comes to an end."

And so when consider what Paul says about the Law in various passages, it is clear that we are not under the Law of Moses.

Let's return to **1 Corinthians 9**...

In **v. 20** Paul lays out his missionary methodology to **Jews**. And then in **v. 21** he lays out his missionary methodology to **Gentiles**. When Paul was among the Gentiles he lived like a Gentile (without sinning; e.g. he didn't worship idols). For our purposes this morning, what I want you to see in **v. 21** is how Paul says that he is not without the Law of God. We are not under the Law of Moses (**v. 20**). But that does not mean we are without the Law of God (**v. 21**). What form then does the Law of God take for Christians? The Law of Christ. We are not under the Law of Moses but we are under the Law of Christ which is the Law of God.

You see, the **old covenant** had a law, the Law of Moses. The **new covenant** also has a law, the Law of Christ. And so the Law of God that we are obligated to keep under the new covenant is the Law of Christ.

Thomas Schreiner, "Freedom from the Mosaic law does not mean that Paul was liberated from all moral norms."

As Christians we are under the Law of Christ. But what is the Law of Christ?

For the answer let's turn to **Galatians 6:2** (this is the only other passage that explicitly refers to the Law of Christ). Essentially, the Law of Christ is to love one another (**John 13:34-35; 15:12-14, 17**). Jesus calls you to lay down your life for others in love.

When Jesus calls us to obey His command He is utilizing the language of law. This is the Law of Christ. And He commands us to obey Him, not Moses.

And so the Law of Christ is to love one another the way that Christ has loved us with sacrificial love. But is the command to love one another all that the Law of Christ requires? No (**John 14:15** (notice the plural "commandments")). The command to love one another is a singular command but there are other commands that Jesus gives (**Matt. 28:20**).

The Law of Christ is all that Christ commands us do including, but not limited to, the command to love one another. We are to obey all that Christ has commanded us (not what Moses commanded us because we are under the Law of Christ).

Acts 1:1-2

The gospel of Luke is "about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (**v. 1**). But there was more that Jesus taught after the gospel of Luke (**v. 2**). He gave "orders to the apostles whom He had chosen." The teaching of Christ was communicated to the apostles (**Acts 2:42**). And so what is the Law of Christ? It is the New Testament. It is all that Jesus taught and commanded either directly in the gospels and through His Apostles in the rest of the NT.

Romans 13:8-10

In the book of **Romans**, as we have already seen, Paul teaches that we are not under the Law of Moses. But here Paul cites the Mosaic Law as authoritative. Cf. Eph. 6:1-3.

Thomas Schreiner, "How can Paul teach that the Mosaic law is abolished and then cite some of its commands as authoritative?"

Thomas Schreiner, “It seems appropriate to designate such commands as moral norms.”

Moral norms are the commands of God that are timeless and that transcend all dispensations and covenants throughout redemptive history. This is the Law that is written on our hearts (**Rom. 2:14-15**). What Law does God write on people’s hearts? Is it the Law of Moses? No. God has not written the command for circumcision on our hearts or the command to offer animal sacrifices. What God has written on our hearts are the moral norms that are based upon His unchanging character which are summarized in the Ten Commandments (excluding the Sabbath).

For example, we are commanded to not murder. This was true under the old covenant and it is true under the new covenant. As Christians we do not commit murder, not because we are under the Law of Moses, but because this command is a timeless moral norm from God.

Technically speaking, we obey the command to not commit murder not because of the Ten Commandments which are part of the Law of Moses, but because this is God’s moral norm that He always requires no matter what era of redemptive history we live in. And so when Paul cites the Law of Moses in **Romans 13** he does so because these commandments in the Law are timeless and always reveal the will of God for His people. It was the will of God to not commit murder before the Law of Moses, during the Law of Moses, and after the Law of Moses. Therefore, the command to not commit murder is part of the Law of Christ.

Thomas Schreiner, “We have seen earlier that the law is both abolished and fulfilled. What we typically call the moral norms of the law are fulfilled, at least in some measure, in the lives of believers. Nevertheless, they are not normative merely because they appear in the Mosaic covenant, for that covenant has passed away. It seems that they are normative because they express the character of God. We know that they still express God’s will for believers because they are repeated as moral norms in the New Testament.”

Thomas Schreiner, “The moral norms of the law still function as the authoritative will of God for the believer since they are part of the law of Christ.”

Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the NT (the only exception is the Sabbath). These are repeated because they are moral norms that are timeless and reflect the moral nature of God. They are part of the Law of Christ and are binding upon us.

And so there is **definite discontinuity** between the OT and NT when it comes to the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses is not legally binding upon the people of God today in the era of the new covenant because it has been replaced with the Law of Christ.

Let me now give **four concluding/clarifying thoughts**:

1. Christians are under the Law of God (i.e. the Law of Christ).

We repudiate antinomianism (1 John 2:4).

2. While we are no longer under the Law of Moses, God’s moral norms continue from the Law of Moses to the Law of Christ. In this way we see harmony between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ. The Law of Moses and the gospel of Jesus are not in conflict. There is a

timeless continuity of moral norms between the two. Love fulfills the Law. In both the Law of Moses and in the Law of Christ we are commanded to love God and to love our neighbor.

3. While the Law of Moses is no longer binding, it is still useful and instructive.

For example, the Law of Moses teaches us about **the character of God**. In the Law we learn that God is holy. And we learn that God requires His people to be holy. While we are not bound to abide by the dietary restrictions and the prohibition against mixing fabrics, these things show us that the people of God are to be holy in all that we do.

The Law of Moses teaches us that **man is sinful**. The entire sacrificial system of the Law shows that the wages of sin is death and our need for atonement. It also teaches us that **God is gracious** in providing substitutionary atonement.

The Law of Moses teaches us the **centrality of worship** and that we are to worship God on His terms not our own terms.

The Law of Moses teaches us the **need for justice** in human society and the **sanctity of human life**. We aren't required to put a fence around our roof, but this command does teach us to protect human life.

The Law of Moses also teaches us about **God's design for human sexuality** among many other things. And so the Law of Moses is still useful and instructive.

4. As those who are under the Law of Christ, we are bound to obey Jesus as our all-sufficient Lord.

As Christians, Jesus is our **mighty Savior**. He is also our **Master and sovereign Lord**. And as our Savior and Lord He is the substance to which the Law of Moses points. He is all that we need. If you have Christ you have everything you need for salvation and for life and godliness.

John MacArthur, "Christ is all we need. He is more than enough. The Bible calls Him life, food, root, clothing, head, hope, righteousness, refuge, light, life, peace, Passover, portion, substitute, freedom, fountain, wisdom, standard, way, example, door, dew, sun, shield, reward, strength, song, sanctification, supplier, resurrection, redemption, teacher, ladder, shepherd, friend, truth, treasure, temple, ark, altar, and more."