

Does the New Testament Teach Us to Obey God's Commandments and Laws given in the Old Testament?

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Many Christians are taught that the commandments and laws of God given in the Old Testament have been "done away with" or "abolished" by the New Covenant and thus they are not obligated to keep them. But is this a true and biblical teaching from the Word of God? What does the New Testament really teach us with regards to God's commandments and laws? In this Bible study, I will carefully examine the teachings in the New Testament on this matter, which include the teaching of Lord Jesus Himself, the teachings of the Apostles, and the confirmations found in the book of Revelation.

THE TEACHING OF LORD JESUS

First of all, Lord Jesus is very clear and consistent that ALL commandments and laws of God ought to be kept and obeyed by the people of God. At His Sermon on the Mount, He states clearly:

"Do NOT think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17, emphasis mine).

Jesus fulfilled the Law by obeying and keeping it in His earthly body, thus setting a great example for His disciples to follow! The Law of God would in NO WAY to be fulfilled if it were done away or abolished by Christ. Therefore, it is the obligation of every follower of Christ, even today, to fulfill the Law and Commandment of God. Jesus further explains in Matthew 5:18-19:

"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (emphasis mine).

Jesus confirms the unfailing nature of the Law in another incident recorded in Luke 16:17:

"It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail".

Since every detail of the Law will stand forever and be accomplished, Jesus expected His followers to honor and keep the Law (including all the commandments of God) as a way to demonstrate their sincere love for Him. He spoke to His close disciples plainly at the night just before His arrest:

"He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him ... he who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me". (John 14: 21, 24, emphasis mine)

Notice, Jesus made it clear that His commandments are not His, but His Father's who sent Him. And He said a few verses later, "I have kept My Father's commandments" (John 15:10). Jesus Himself has set an example for His disciples to keep all the commandments of God the Father.

Keeping the commandments of God is not only a way to show our sincere love for Christ our Savior, but the Way to Eternal Life and the Kingdom of God.

When asked by a young ruler about how to obtain eternal life, Jesus gave a simple and straight answer, "if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19: 17).

Jesus confirms this truth in John 12:50, "I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me".

At His concluding remarks in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter" (Matthew 7:21, emphasis mine).

The will of God is fully reflected in the commandments and laws that God gave to the Israelites in the Old Testament. Jesus is saying that only those who faithfully keep and obey these commandments and laws of God will be granted the right to enter the soon-coming kingdom of heaven on earth! And it is without any doubt that these commandments and laws of God will continue to be the rules and laws based on which Christ the King will govern His Millennial Kingdom.

THE TEACHING OF APOSTLE PAUL

Now, let's turn to the teachings of the Apostles in the New Testament to see if they concur with the teaching of Christ on this matter. First, let's look at the writings of Paul, the most important contributor to the New Testament. In the book of Romans, he openly proclaims:

"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law ... Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law". (Romans 3:28, 31, emphasis added)

It is clear that Paul is NOT trying to put down the Law by maintaining justification by faith only. Rather, he clarifies that the justified are to hold up and continue to abide in the Law. A few chapters later, he confirms this notion by saying:

"For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit". (Romans 8:3-4, emphasis mine)

How might the requirement of the Law be fulfilled in us? Paul suggests we should walk according to the Spirit of love:

"Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law". (Romans 13:10, emphasis mine)

Later on at his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul emphasizes again that:

"Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God". (1 Corinthians 7:19, emphasis mine)

In his departing word to Timothy, Paul once again urges his beloved disciple to:

"... keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Timothy 6:14, emphasis mine)

It is thus without any doubt that Apostle Paul does NOT indicate that the commandments and laws of God have been abolished or done away with; on the contrary, he advocates establishing and fulfilling the Law through walking according to the Spirit of love.

THE TEACHING OF APOSTLE JOHN

Next, I would like to examine if the teaching of Apostle John confirms the teachings of Christ and Paul on this matter. In the 2nd Chapter of the book of 1 John, John specifically addresses this issue starting verse 3:

“3By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: 6the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked”. (1 John 2:3-6, emphasis mine)

As clearly as it is, John tells us that our obedience to God’s commandments and His word is the sign that shows our true knowledge of God and distinguishes us from liars and fake believers. Further, by walking in obedience to God’s commandments just as Christ Himself did, we have the inner assurance that we are truly in Him (v5b-6), and He also in us:

“The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us”. (1 John 3:24, emphasis mine)

Another important truth revealed by John is that only in those who are obedient to His word the approving love of God has become a reality (v5a). John confirms this truth two chapters later in the same book:

“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome”. (1 John 5:3, emphasis mine, see also 2 John 1:6)

This perfectly parallels the word of Christ in John 14:21:

“He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him”.

Following his statement in 1 John 2:3-6, John further clarifies that the commandments he is talking about here are actually the commandments given by God in the Old Testament:

“Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard”. (1 John 2:7, see also 2 John 1:5-6)

THE TEACHINGS OF OTHER APOSTLES

Well now we have examined the teachings of two major New Testament writers: Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, and John, the disciple Jesus loved. What then about the teachings of other apostles, i.e. Peter and James, on this issue?

Peter, one of the closest disciples of Christ and prominent leader of the early Church, writes in 2 Peter Chapter 2:

“For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them”. (2 Peter 2:21, emphasis mine)

Here Peter calls the commandment as “the holy commandment” and “the way of righteousness” which was “handed on to them” by the prophets and Lord Jesus Christ. And he commands them to “remember” it. (See also 2 Peter 3:2)

Concerning the words of Paul regarding the law and commandments of God, Peter warns those who would twist and distort Paul’s teaching:

“and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction”. (2 Peter 3:15-16, emphasis mine)

Then, he gives exhortation to the faithful and obedient:

“You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”. (2 Peter 3:17-18, emphasis mine)

James, the brother of Jesus Christ, who became the presiding Apostle at Jerusalem, is also a strong advocate of the law, which he calls “the royal law” (James 2:8) and “the law of liberty” (James 2:12). See what he says in the book of James Chapter 2, starting verse 8:

“If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,’ you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors”. (James 2:8-9, emphasis mine)

It is obvious that at the time of his writing, the Law, i.e. the Ten Commandments, was still in force within the church and among Christians. It acted as the standard and measurement of their everyday lives. And every commandment of the law ought to be kept and obeyed, as James continues in the next few verses:

"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,' also said, 'DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty".
(James 2:10-12, emphasis mine)

THE CONFIRMATIONS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Finally let's look at the confirmations found in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 12, Apostle John was given a series of visions in heaven, which concern the days of the great tribulation/persecution in the end times. We see that after the dragon (Satan) was thrown down to earth, having great wrath (v12), he first "persecuted the woman (Israel) who gave birth to the male child (Christ)" (v13). But God helped the woman (Israel) and delivered her to the wilderness (a place of safety). The Scripture tells us that:

"So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus". (Revelation 12:17, emphasis mine)

"The rest of her children" are the true followers of Christ, who are spiritual "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). Notice they are described as those "who keep commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus"! It is upon these obedient commandment-keeping followers of Christ that the wrath of Satan falls, as he "went off" to "make war with" them.

At another incident in Revelation, the Word of God once again confirms the character of the true saints of God:

"Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus". (Revelation 14:12, emphasis mine)

Lastly, Revelation 14:12 describes those who will live with God the Father and Christ throughout eternity in the New Jerusalem:

"Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (KJV, emphasis mine).

CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen from the Bible verses above, numerous passages in the New Testament harmoniously echo the same truth: the commandments and holy law of God is eternal and should be kept by true followers of Jesus Christ at all times.

Doing so, we demonstrate our sincere love to Him. Doing so, we prove and have inner assurance that we are truly His. Doing so, we set our feet on the right way toward eternal life and the soon-coming Kingdom of God on earth.

We shall then follow the example that Christ set for us during His life on earth to fulfill the whole law of God through walking in obedience and according to the Spirit of love.

While in the world as the end is approaching we will have tribulations because of our commitment to the commandments of God and our faith and testimony of Jesus, we are promised by God to receive His blessings and inherit eternal life and the kingdom to come!