

Why Study the Law of Moses?

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Most Christians are not attracted to the study of the Law of Moses. We “are not under the Law, but under grace” says Romans 6:14; so why waste time and effort going over all those obligations and ritual ceremonies that did not profit those who served under them?

What we call “the Law of Moses” is actually the Law of God, and it was given to the Jewish nation of Israel. But *why* was it given? To put the question in the words of the Apostle Paul: “What purpose then does the law serve?” (Galatians 3:19). He says that it was a “schoolmaster” or *tutor* that led to Christ (verse 24). As such, we should understand that it occupies an important part of Scripture. Paul told Timothy:

“All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

So the Law *is profitable* and has a great deal to teach us. The very word “Law” (Hebrew: *Torah*) means “direction, teaching” says *Young’s concordance*. *Strong* says that the word *Torah* is “from the root to teach,” and carries the idea of 1.) Instruction, doctrine; and 2.) Law... As Paul told the Galatians, it was a *tutor*.

The Law is Spiritual

All men and women who are unenlightened in the ways of God are by nature “lawless.” Behavior is governed by the natural instincts—and in their unrestricted and uncontrolled form those instincts are comparable to that of the animal. It is God’s Law that provides direction and teaching—it enlightens and instructs, but does not of itself *save*.

“The Law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good,” says Romans 7:12. “For we know that *the Law is spiritual*: but I am carnal, sold under sin” (verse 14). So then, all those who are afflicted and burdened by the weakness and cravings of the lower nature can gain from

studying God’s Law. This is what Paul says in essence when writing to Timothy:

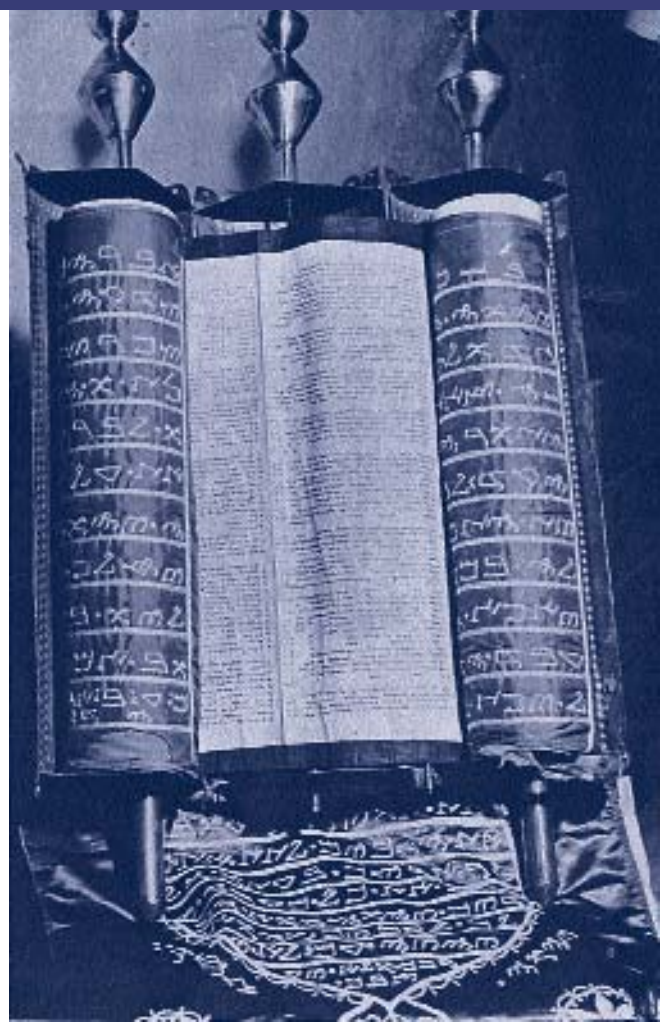
“But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for *the* lawless and insubordinate, for *the* ungodly and for sinners, for *the* unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, ...” (1 Timothy 1:8-10).

We may not be murderers, etc., but let us see the point here. The Law, through its instruction, produces and increases an awareness of sin (compare Rom. 7:7). The unenlightened mind does not appreciate the ugliness of sin, but by studying the Law the level of consciousness is raised so that a person develops a keen perception of right and wrong. In this way the study of the Law sharpens the conscience of all who meditate upon it. Through it we learn to *hate* iniquity; we can develop a frame of mind that is repulsed by the filthiness of unrestrained human behavior. Such an outlook and understanding helps us in our struggle against sin—but as we have already noted, it cannot of itself save us.

Higher Standards

The Law of Moses then, brought before sinful men and women a higher standard of life—it introduced them to the ways of God—for it is His Law. Moses told Israel:

“in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live



and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess” (Deuteronomy 30:16).

Through the prophet Isaiah (55:8-9) God says that His thoughts are not our thoughts and that His ways are infinitely higher than ours—and it is the Law that instructs us as to that higher way of life. Here we learn of it in its detail. Consider the following comment by Robert Roberts concerning the Law:

“The law of Moses was an entirely new departure from the customs of the heathen. It was careful to deprecate conformity with these:— ‘After the doings of the land of Egypt wherein you dwell, and after the doings of the land of Canaan where I bring you, *shall you not do*. Neither shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall do my judgments and keep My ordinances to walk therein; I am the Lord your God’. It will be advantageous to briefly glance at the excellent features of the new ordinances delivered to Israel.

“They were not to oppress or to take advantage of any man. While this applied peculiarly to their Hebrew brethren, they were expressly enjoined to treat the

stranger kindly in all their transactions. Even an enemy's interests they were to consider. If they saw an enemy's ox or ass going astray, they were to take it back to its owner. If they saw their enemy's beast lying helplessly under a burden, they were not to refrain from helping him. (There is nothing of this sort in British law. Feelings of kindness are excluded from law as a sentimental weakness). They were to take no gift in judgment. They were not to administer justice with any bias. They were not to be carried away by a majority in a wrong matter, nor were they to take up a poor man's cause in any partisan spirit. They were not to befriend him because he was poor, but because he was in the right, if it was so.

"They were to do no unrighteousness of any kind. They were to be slow to mention an evil matter. Tale-bearing was to be frowned down. They were to nurse no hatred and practice no revenge. They were not to take advantage of weakness, or indulge in cruel sport. They were not to curse the deaf, or lay stumbling-blocks before the blind. They were to be prompt in the payment of wages, and they were to be liberal in the relief of poverty, and ready to lend to their brothers in distress, not taking usury, or even acting up to their legal rights in the matter of security...

"In reaping the fields or vineyards, no parsimonious spirit was to be shown. There was to be no going over them a second time to pick up or gather what had been overlooked. Field and vineyard were to be left un gleaned to give the poor a chance. Moderns would think this wasteful, improvident, and unbusinesslike; but there is a better business spirit than the modern one, though we cannot see it practiced 'till the establishment of new heavens and new earth wherein dwells righteousness'.

"They were to honor grey hairs, and rise up before the aged. Reverence to seniors was to be carried to a high degree. Not only were father and mother to be honored, but any man lifting his hand against, or even cursing them, was to be held guilty of a capital offence and put to death.

"Sexual license was shown no mercy. It is common to think that woman was unprotected under the law of Moses. In point of fact, it is under the Gentile law that she is defenseless. It is one of the foulest blots on European civilization that man may make sport of female honor—not only with impunity, but acquire a certain prestige by his exploits. Woman had a lower position

in some points under Moses than ladies occupy in modern educated circles; but she was thoroughly protected. If a man robbed her of her chastity, he was to be put to death without remorse, or compelled to make the woman his wife. As for the adultery of married people, no satisfaction was accepted; the penalty was death."

These principles may be seen from a reading of Leviticus chapter 19.

Men and women could not in their weakness, keep these high standards faultlessly—and so it was that the Law brought home to Israelites, as it will bring home to all of us, the need of God's mercy. Both Jew and Gentile need Christ.

Fulfilling the Law

In Romans 13:9-10, Paul writes this:

"For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if *there is* any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

"For all the Law," he says in Galatians 5:14, "is fulfilled in one word, even this; (citing Lev. 19:18) You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

This principle penetrates right into "the inward parts"—to the very motive and springs of action. Men and women do what they *want* to do—and this is an important thing to realize. Under the Law certain things were *demand*ed of people—whereas those who are under grace keep the spirit of the Law *voluntarily*—and for this reason: their love for Christ. With Paul they can say (because it is their conviction and experience): "the love of Christ constrains us" (2 Cor. 5:14).

Now the Law, as a tutor, *brings us to this*. It teaches us our need for mercy. That mercy—and freedom from the Law of commandments—is available to us because of what Jesus Christ has done in offering himself without spot, as a representative sacrifice. He has fulfilled the Law perfectly—and if we want to appreciate what that means we must know what the requirements of the Law were. To appreciate Christ, we must therefore study the law. Then, with Paul, we can say:

"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God; through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law

of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. *There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." (Romans 7:24- 25; 8:1-2).

The Law is Good

Even though the Law cannot of itself save us, yet it is still *profitable*. If we want to experience happiness in life, even now, here are some helpful rules to build into our lives. Yes, we are under grace and have no need to keep the letter of the Law but its spirit—that is to say its principles—will be active in the lives of believers. In Romans 7:6 we read:

"...now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter."

We must always remember that the Law was given by God, it is His Law. The Lord Jesus Christ said:

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." (Matthew 5:17).

We must remember too that the Law still has a future. When Christ returns and sets up the kingdom of God upon earth, we learn that:

"Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." (Isaiah 2:3).

No doubt this will be a modified form of the Mosaic Law—it will not be exactly the same—but adjusted for the circumstances of the Future Age. This can be seen from Ezekiel's prophecies, chapters 40 and onwards. The shadowy aspects (see Colossians 2:17) will obviously not be relevant, but its principles governing morality and society generally—and its punishments—will be a necessary discipline bringing righteousness and peace to the entire world.

Those who will have the task of governing the nations under Christ will need to know the law; they will need to know God's Law, and there can be little doubt that studying it now will help to equip them for that task.