

# Which Old Testament LAWS *are in force today?*

*For the first time we publish the basic principles explaining which commands are still in force. Read how you can prove from Scripture which laws in the Old Testament were changed or abolished, and which we are commanded to observe today!*

*by Herman L. Hoeh*

LETTERS continue to arrive from you brethren asking us, "Which laws am I to keep?" Others wish advice in order to explain to interested friends why some laws were abolished and others remain in force.

We have never had the opportunity to publish the full answers to these questions before. We had no magazine especially for you brethren. Most of the readers of *The PLAIN TRUTH*—our evangelistic magazine—are not yet able to grasp the deeper truths of God's law and His way of life.

But you brethren do need to KNOW!

Let us notice, first of all, the New Testament teaching.

Jesus—the living Head of our church—told the disciples: "Whoso therefore shall break one of these *least* commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoso shall DO and TEACH them, the same shall be called *great* in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:19).

How important it is, then, that we—the disciples of Jesus today—become familiar with the least commandments—that we live by *every word of God*.

## God Is Lawgiver

God's church differs from all others in that it takes the Bible as ABSOLUTE and FINAL AUTHORITY. We are not to argue with God and use human reason to evade the plain commands of Scripture. God is Supreme Lawgiver. He knows what is best for us. He has perfect wisdom and understanding. We can place our confidence in Him and rely on His judgment which He committed to writing for us—in the Bible.

No one can gain entrance into God's church unless that individual first recognizes the authority and rule of God by *repenting and believing* the things written in Scripture. But repentance is not simply one act. It must be a CONSTANT PRACTICE as we grow in knowledge and correct our mistakes. We must continually yield ourselves to every word of

God. It is *not enough* to say, "I repented once and that is sufficient."

The tendency is to use human reason to side-step what seems of lesser importance to us. It is so very easy for us to say: "I don't see why God would want us to keep this. It seems so impractical in this modern age. Now here is the way I see it."

And yet, my brethren, this attitude is exactly what makes other churches carnal and worldly—of the devil. They use their human reason instead of accepting the Bible as *final* AUTHORITY.

It does us good, however, when so many of you ask us questions about the way that God reveals we should live. We know that when you write us you are in earnest to understand the laws of God. So let us all open our minds and come to a new understanding of pure, true Christianity.

## Ten Commandments Binding at Creation

God's church recognizes the eternal binding authority of the ten Commandments. David was inspired to say: "All his commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness" (Ps. 110:7-8). Jesus didn't abolish the ten commandments. "Think not," He said, "that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill."

The ten commandments constitute the basic spiritual law which regulates human life. It is holy, just and good, said Paul in Romans 7:12 and 14.

We know, also, that we should observe the annual festivals, that we should **tithe**, that we should obey the rules of health pertaining to meats. *But what many do not understand is HOW TO PROVE that we should keep these laws which are not a direct part of the ten commandments.* How are the lesser laws to be distinguished from the ceremonial laws and carnal ordinances so often connected with them?

First, remember that God's basic spir-

itual laws existed from the beginning. When speaking of divorce, Jesus said that "*from the beginning* it was not so" (Matt. 19:8). It was a sin at the beginning of this present creation to commit adultery!

The world strayed so far from the truth that, by the days of Moses, God had to reveal His law anew to the Israelites. Israel had lost a knowledge of God's ways while in Egyptian bondage. Let us notice, however, that God was merely revealing the laws which were already in force. The old covenant did *not* establish the laws.

In Exodus 16:28 we read that the Eternal, when speaking about Israel to Moses, said: "How long do you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?"

Israel could not refuse what did not exist!

Now turn to Exodus 18:16. Moses told his father-in-law that when the people have a dispute, "I make them know the statutes of God and his judgments."

Notice! *Here are the statutes and judgments of God existing BEFORE the old covenant.* As they existed before the old covenant, they could not be abolished when it ceased to exist. The old covenant could not destroy what it did not bring into force.

But when did the carnal ceremonies and sacrifices of the Levitical priesthood begin? And how can we distinguish them from the statutes and judgments that existed *prior* to the old covenant?

## When Did Sacrificial Laws Begin?

When God brought Israel to the foot of Mt. Sinai, He gave the ten commandments to them. He allowed Moses to declare all the statutes and judgments to Israel (Exodus, chapters 20-24).

Now notice carefully. There is only one sacrifice mentioned in the book of the law—the *passover* sacrifice (Exodus 23:18). God called it "MY sacrifice." Next, turn to Jeremiah 7:22-23. Listen

the slaves of a master *forever*—meaning till the death of one of the parties. (See Exodus 21:6; Lev. 25:46; Deut. 15:17.)

What are the factors surrounding sacrifices? One, the priesthood. Two, the need for sacrifices.

What is the purpose of a priesthood? To offer sacrifices and to act on behalf of men in relation to God (Hebrews 5:1 and 8:3). But how long do offerings for sins need to be made? Paul tells us: "Now where remission of these is, *there is no more offering for sin*" (Hebrews 10:18).

To offer sacrifices for sin after Christ gave His life in full payment for all sins makes a mockery of Him. Therefore, SINCE PHYSICAL OFFERINGS WERE NO LONGER NEEDED—AND HENCE THE PHYSICAL LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD WAS NO LONGER NECESSARY—the old testament offerings are no longer binding. The factors involved in the original law ceased to exist.

Perhaps we have failed to realize that God ALONE has the right to rescind, change or alter *material* laws. God will change the present chemical and physical laws that govern this temporary universe (Matt. 5:18). In like manner, God has already changed the *carnal* laws added to the old covenant. *Those carnal laws were subject to change because their everlasting endurance depended upon physical circumstances*—the coming of the promised seed, Christ, who should take upon Himself the sins of the world. When the circumstances were altered, the everlasting obligation to the carnal laws ceased.

GOD WILL NOT, HOWEVER, ALTER HIS SPIRITUAL LAWS. The spiritual laws describe the very character of God. They enable us to know what God is like. Since the character of God remains un-

*changing*—"I change not, saith the Eternal" (Mal. 3:6) and "Jesus, the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8)—the spiritual laws could not change. Again, God is LOVE. And God's love is defined in I John 5:3: "For this is the love of God, that we *keep his commandments*." We can have the same love that is in the Father's heart, if we practice His commands—the way He, Himself, lives.

#### Carnal Laws Distinguished from Others

It is important that we notice, now, that *the spiritual principles underlying the material sacrificial laws are still binding*. Since God can never rescind His spiritual law—the ten commandments—there is always the need of a Supreme Sacrifice so long as sin exists. That everlasting sacrifice is Jesus, the Christ.

The same holds true for us. Peter says that we are "a royal priesthood"—"a holy priesthood" (I Peter 2:5,9). Since we are a priesthood, of which Jesus Christ is High Priest, then WE NEED TO OFFER SACRIFICES, TOO. What sacrifices can we offer? "I appeal to you," said Paul, "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service" (Romans 12:1, Panin trans.).

Do you see how the spiritual principles underlying sacrifice are perpetuated today, although the carnal law passed away nearly 2000 years ago? The same is true of circumcision. Paul spent many chapters convincing the Jews that circumcision—not a harmful rite in itself—was not needed for salvation. Yet Abraham's children are all to be circumcised—in the heart (Rom. 2:29).

Now let us learn where we can find exactly what constituted the temporary laws. Turn with me to Hebrews 9:9-10. In these two verses we read of the material gifts and sacrifices which included "ONLY meats and drinks and diverse washings—carnal ordinances, imposed until the time of reformation." Notice that the temporary laws did not pertain to murder or theft or sabbath-breaking, but were ONLY those ordinances regulating meat and drink offerings and different washings or ablutions of the unclean. *These external washings were a type of the Holy Spirit cleaning us up within.*

ANY OTHER LAWS NOT INCLUDED IN HEBREWS 9:10 WERE NOT PART OF THE RITUALS ADDED BECAUSE OF SIN!

Remember this point! It will help you to know which rites in the old testament were added to the statutes and judgments already in existence.

#### What Is the Law of Moses?

Some people are easily confused by the trick statement that the ten com-

to what the Eternal inspired Jeremiah to write: "For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I DID NOT SPEAK . . . OR COMMAND *them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices*. But this COMMAND I GAVE THEM: 'Obey my voice . . . and walk in ALL THE WAY THAT I COMMAND YOU, that it may be well with you.'"

God did not command sacrifices to be offered originally. This explains why none of those temporary sacrifices were perpetuated by different symbols in the New Testament Church. ONLY THE PASSOVER IS PRESERVED BY DIFFERENT SYMBOLS TODAY—because it began *before* the old covenant was made. (See its institution in Exodus 12.) The very fact that Jesus substituted unleavened bread and wine for the passover only, and not for the temporary offerings, is absolute proof that the old testament offerings are not binding today!

Paul says (Gal. 3:19) they were added because of transgression—because God's spiritual law was being broken—*until* Christ should come. They were substitutes for the sacrifice of Christ and as a "reminder of sin" to teach the people the need of the Messiah who would pay the penalty of human transgression (Hebrews 10:3).

"But," many ask, "weren't the sacrifices ordained *forever*?"

Yes, the Bible does say that the Levitical priesthood and its sacrifices were to be perpetual or forever. But let us understand the real significance of the Hebrew word translated "forever." It means *continuous, so long as the factors involved exist*.

Notice three scriptures where this meaning is made plain. Men could be

mandments are the law of Moses. They turn to Luke 2:22-24 in which the ceremonies of the law of Moses are also called part of the law of the Lord.

Why?

Because all law comes from God. Moses is not the lawmaker! He merely told the people the laws that God set in motion (John 1:17).

Let us not let men tell us what constituted the law of Moses. Here is God's definition in Malachi 4:4: "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and judgments that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel."

The law of Moses is NEVER called the ten commandments. It comprises the statutes and judgments which God gave him to communicate to the people. The difference between the law of Moses and the ten commandments is that God spoke the ten words, but Moses delivered the statutes and judgments.

Now, let us recall that when Moses first delivered the statutes and judgments, the law of Moses had no sacrifices connected with it. Jeremiah said so! (Jer. 7:22). But *after* the close of the old covenant (Ex. 24), the Levitical priesthood was established and the laws regulating offerings were added (Exodus 28:1). (Prior to this time offerings were voluntary and young men were priests—Exodus 24:5.)

The law of Moses was originally the civil law, based on the ten commandments. Those civil statutes and judgments are right and good (Psalm 119:7,8).

**BUT ADDED TO THEM WERE OTHER STATUTES AND JUDGMENTS REGULATING MATERIAL RITUALS, SUCH AS SACRIFICES, LIGHTING OF CANDLES, BURNING INCENSE, AND VARIOUS WASHINGS FOR THE UNCLEAN.**

This almost unnoticed fact is what causes so much difficulty in understanding that the LAW OF MOSES WAS COMPOSED OF *two* DISTINCT PARTS: THE CIVIL AND THE RITUALISTIC!

Part of Law of Moses Still in Force!

Jesus said the two great commandments were love to God and love to neighbor. Do you know from where He quoted these laws?

Out of the book of the law!—the laws that Moses spoke to the people. Read it in Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." And Deuteronomy 6:4: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."

In II John 5 and 6, God commands Christians to obey these two basic laws which He communicated to the people by Moses! In II Kings 23:25, Josiah is praised because he "turned to the Lord

with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, ACCORDING TO THE LAW OF MOSES!"

Notice how plain it is. The civil law of Moses expounds the ten commandments by revealing how the ten basic principles are to be applied.

Then why do we read in Acts that Gentile converts do not have to observe the law of Moses, except for four points? (Acts 15.) The answer is made plain in Acts 21:21. The laws of Moses called in question involved "customs." Read it for yourself. The Jews were falsely accusing Paul, saying that he taught Jews living abroad "not to circumcise their children or observe the CUSTOMS"! (Acts 21:21.)

The controversy in the early church did not involve spiritual principles of love and obedience in the *civil* law of Moses. It involved only *ceremonial additions* to the original *civil* law of Moses. The controversy in Acts 15 involved only *customs*—ADDED ceremonies or rituals. This is further proven by noticing the four points which are binding on all Christians everywhere.

These points were connected with rituals. We are not to eat blood, animals which are strangled, meats offered to idols or to practice fornication. These four *spiritual* points involving fornication and eating blood were connected with *customs* or *ceremonies* of the law of Moses. The *civil* law was not involved.

You will find them taken from Leviticus 17:7 and 10. "And they shall no more offer their sacrifices unto demons, after whom they have gone a whoring. This shall be a statute for ever unto them throughout their generations." Pagan *idolatry* involved physical *fornication* as well as spiritual whoredom (Numbers 25:1-3).

Continuing from Leviticus 17:10: "And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood," says the Eternal. Any animal *strangled* contained blood.

How plain! *Only the ceremonial customs* of the law of Moses have passed away. The many civil laws regulating tithing, clean and unclean meats, the annual sabbaths, and many others are still for the New Testament Church because they explain the ten commandments.

For example: God forbids us to eat unclean meats. To take what He forbids is to covet. One of the ten commandments says: "Thou shalt NOT covet."

Now let us consider the use of the death penalty in old testament times.

#### Ministration of Death

A common question often asked is

this: Why do we not enforce the death penalty for sabbath-breakers or any other violation of the ten commandments?

In the January 1953 GOOD NEWS, we published an article explaining the truth about the administration of death. If you have not already read it, be sure to write in for a back copy.

The answer to this question is found in Matthew 5. Let us turn to this important chapter again. Jesus was anticipating doubts in the minds of the disciples. He commences by saying He came to keep the law, not to destroy it. Then he proceeds to CHANGE the civil laws as they were given to ancient Israel. He magnifies them and makes them honorable. He raises them from narrow, national laws to a spiritual plane regulating the whole of human society. Six times Jesus says: "You have heard it said in olden times. . . . But I say to you. . . ." and He then proceeds to expound the spiritual principles underlying the civil laws of Moses.

In particular, notice Matthew 5:38: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . .'"

Why did Jesus RESTORE THESE SPIRITUAL LAWS as they were from the beginning? Why was Moses commanded to give them only in the letter to ancient Israel?

Ancient Israel was not like the church of God today. It was a national church—a carnal nation organized into the congregation of Israel. They did not have the promise of the Holy Spirit; they were a nation of this world. Moses said that they did not even have the power or strength of will to keep what little he commanded them (Deut. 5:29). And neither do human beings today! People don't want to obey the commandments. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God" (Rom. 8:7). Israel needed punishments for lawbreakers to keep peace and security in the land.

Jesus came to make it possible for us to have the very nature of God acting in us. Therefore He restored the civil law to its original spiritual perfection. And with that restoration the power to administer the death penalty in the church of God passed from men to Him who created man. Today God corrects us as His children. "Vengeance is mine," says God. We are rather to suffer wrong and trust God.

#### How to Apply These Principles

Thus far in our study we have found three main texts which can guide us in  
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## Which LAWS are in force?

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studying the laws of the old testament: *Jeremiah 7:22; Hebrews 9:10 and Matthew 5:21 through 44*. These key scriptures explain what constituted the substitutes for Christ and the Holy Spirit, and what laws were mere permissions by Moses to a carnal people *who could not keep the law in the spirit*. Let us not think for a moment that God was unfair to deal with them so. After all, Israel told God that they could keep the law!

Now we can turn to the old covenant and compare it briefly with what we have studied in other passages.

Concerning the laws of *warfare* found in Deuteronomy 20, we find the New Testament teaching us that our warfare is not carnal, but spiritual—that we do not struggle with human beings but with wicked spirits in high places (Matt. 5:38 and Ephesians 6). The laws in Deuteronomy were given to a physical nation to regulate physical conditions.

Concerning *slavery*, Paul says that we should not *become* the slaves of human beings (I Cor. 7:21-24), although if we

were converted while being slaves, we should *abide* in our calling until freedom can be purchased. A great many are in slavery to this day and do not know it! We are to be enterprising and efficient enough that we become the masters of our occupations. The original law took into consideration the fact that slavery was a universal practice that needed to be regulated.

Concerning uncleanness of women during childbirth (Leviticus 12), the customs of the law of Moses were temporary, but based upon principles of health. These laws, *as well as other diverse washings*, were to keep the people mindful of the need to be *externally* pure. It is a good practice, however, that women obtain rest after bearing children.

The Holy Days are to be observed apart from the added ceremonies which were performed by the Levitical priesthood for the people. The Levites, not the people, were to blow the trumpets on the Feast of Trumpets.

Concerning the inheritance of property in Leviticus 27: we are now sojourners and not inheritors. God has not given us permanent possessions during this age. But when the government of God is established during the millennium, then no one will be allowed to take away the rightful inheritance of another, and each individual will be allowed to return to his inheritance during the Jubilee.

In general, you can apply the principles of Matthew 5 to the book of Deuteronomy and portions of the book of Numbers, Leviticus and Exodus. In other cases, where the ceremonial statutes are found, you should compare the verses with Hebrews 9:10 and Jeremiah 7:22. IF THERE IS NO CHANGE OR ABOLITION OF THE LAWS FOUND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, THEN YOU CAN BE REASONABLY SURE THAT THEY ARE TO BE OBSERVED TODAY.