

# Further thoughts on law

## Introduction

This is a concise essay intended to demonstrate that God's law is always associated with the concepts of kingdom, sonship and theocracy and that the change from the Old Covenant (Mosaic Law) to New Covenant (law of Christ) was a change from external materialism to spiritual life; from shadow to reality, from Moses to Christ. The external form was preparatory, pointing to Christ, and is now obsolete; the spiritual form is eternal and is only operational today within believers. Its final form awaits the new world after the Second Coming. This has massive ramifications both for the life of believers in practice but also to various systems of theology.

## OT Law and the kingdom

Law is associated with the kingdom. The kingdom is the reign of God and the subjects under his domain; therefore the law is the principles that govern that reign and provide statutes for the people of the king.

This leads directly to the notion of theocracy. Properly applied, the governance of God's law requires a theocracy; and this is what occurred in the governing of OT Israel by the Mosaic Law. OT Israel was a theocratic state.

This is also necessitated by Reconstructionism, which seeks to re-apply Mosaic Law to modern nation states. They admit that this is but seeking a new theocracy. While contending against the applications of this, Covenant Theology Reformed scholars fail to see that what Theonomists are doing is only the logical outcome of their own system of theology.

Covenant Theology logically necessitates a theocracy; indeed many subscribers to this system in history either became Erastians or held to the application of Mosaic Law in a watered down fashion in their state governance (e.g. Geneva at the time of Calvin or Knox's Scotland). There is no artificial division of Mosaic Law into civil, ceremonial and moral; indeed there are verses where all three forms appear. This artificial division was a means used by early Covenant theologians to abolish parts of the law which are clearly defunct and yet keep the moral aspects (despite the intermingling of all three within single verses). So, if you are keeping the Mosaic Law, you must keep the civil law as well – hence a theocracy is required.

So, following Mosaic Law necessitates a theocratic system. The law of God is applied to all the subjects of God in his kingdom and God is the judge and ruler of that kingdom, even if there are delegated sub-rulers. Indeed, in the OT these sub-rulers are called 'gods' on occasion as they stood, in principle, for God in their judgments.

## OT law and God's son

The law of God, (being the expression of the mind of God for behaviour, the will of God) is the rule of life for God's children. Thus Israel is spoken of as God's son, called out of Egypt.<sup>1</sup> After being delivered from the Egyptian Pharaoh, Israel was formally designated as God's son and then immediately given the law. The law was the set of principles to govern all human behaviour, whether in worship, civil matters or personal godliness. Under God the king, Israel had laws to obey to ensure conformity to the will of the king.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Israel is My son, My firstborn,' Ex 4:22. 'When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son', Hos 11:1.

### Interim summary

So the Mosaic Law was the undergirding statutes that govern the people of God in his kingdom and under his reign, and also the ethical principles to lead God's sons in their behaviour so that they manifest the character of their Father. This is true theocracy, not only are God's people subjects of the kingdom but they are also sons of the king. Israel, as a nation, represented this theocracy in fulness, in every detail, and yet utterly failed to fulfil the commands of God and was rejected as God's representative. Indeed, this was predestined as God's purpose in order to: a) point to the need for Christ; and b) show men that they cannot fulfil this law at all.

### The change made by Christ

Christ came as the fulfilment of the Mosaic Law;<sup>2</sup> everything in the law pointed to him, either in its application of wisdom or in typology.<sup>3</sup> The fact that Jews could not keep the law<sup>4</sup> showed that they needed someone to keep it for them.

The identification of Christ as God's son, in replacement for Israel, is seen in Matthew 2:15 where the prophecy of Hosea, formerly applied to national Israel, is now applied to Christ instead. This is why Joseph and Mary had to flee to Egypt before Christ could begin his ministry.

So, the manifestation of God's kingdom is now in God's only begotten Son. Christ is the kingdom and the sonship. Therefore, the law is now found in Christ and not on external tablets of stone.<sup>5</sup>

When Christ came, all the former things were annulled in their external form. They were shadows<sup>6</sup> that pointed to Christ but were not the reality. Thus the law, as found in its Old Covenant form, was also cancelled, having no further use. Its purpose was to point to Christ, to magnify sin to demonstrate that men cannot do spiritual good, and to govern Israel. Now Christ has come these things have been fulfilled and even Israel is no longer part of God's purposes as a nation. The kingdom of God is no longer seen in Israel.<sup>7</sup>

Christ is the fulfilment of the law;<sup>8</sup> Christ is the reality, Christ is the replacement of Israel, being the kingdom and the sonship. Christ is what all the Old Testament longed for and pointed towards. It was all focused on Christ, not the external things themselves. Missing this leads to all sorts of theological errors, such as Dispensationalism and Jewish Root theology.

Thus the Mosaic Law was a temporary, external form of God's law affixed to Israel and only fit for Israel; it was never applied to the nations who were without God. Its period began hundreds of years after the promise of the Gospel by Christ to Abraham and the

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<sup>2</sup> 'Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil.' Matt 5:17.

<sup>3</sup> 'All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me,' Lk 24:44.

<sup>4</sup> 'Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?' Acts 15:10.

<sup>5</sup> 'You are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart,' 2 Cor 3:3.

<sup>6</sup> '[Priests] who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle ... For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things,' Heb 8:5, 10:1. 'A festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ,' Col 2:16-17.

<sup>7</sup> 'I [Jesus] say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it,' Matt 21:43. In fact the NT demonstrates that Jews became the foremost enemy of the church.

<sup>8</sup> 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes,' Rm 10:4.

covenant established with him.<sup>9</sup> It finished when Christ came.<sup>10</sup> Since it came after the promise of the Gospel, Mosaic Law is not part of the Gospel, but served a purpose of educating Israel and showing her weakness and need of the Gospel. John emphasises that Mosaic Law is not part of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Mosaic Law (the Old Covenant) was fleshly<sup>12</sup> but the New Covenant is spiritual.<sup>13</sup> This does not mean that Mosaic Law was unholy; it was holy since it came from God via angels,<sup>14</sup> but the strength of it was fleshly, which was why it could not be obeyed. The Mosaic Law had no internal power to help keep it, unlike the New Covenant.

### **Christ's human mission**

Christ could not come to bring law, which emphasised 'do this and live', because his purpose was to bring grace, which means 'you cannot do this but I will give it to you anyway'. Christ could not establish a covenant of grace on the basis of law.

What Christ did was to subject himself to the Mosaic Law and fulfil every part of it perfectly, and then die to it, sealing it in his death. It was completed and fulfilled. Thus Christ established, as a man, a perfect righteousness under the law. Having gained this divine recognition of a perfect life, he was able to share this perfect righteousness because he is God as well as man and therefore infinite. The quality of his person-hood, being infinite, means that it can be shared with members of his body. Thus believers in Christ share his righteousness, having it imputed to them in justification. Thus Christ's work becomes our righteousness.<sup>15</sup> His obedience led to our imputed righteousness.

This righteousness is the result of the grace of God which, being given to the elect, leads to reigning in life and eternal life.<sup>16</sup> In other words, being sons of the king and sharing the life of the king. This is why the Gospel is sometimes called the 'Gospel of the Kingdom'.<sup>17</sup> The coming of Jesus meant that the kingdom was at hand.<sup>18</sup> The result of the Gospel in Christ is the giving both of eternal life and the kingdom.

The work of Christ leads to those in him being the kingdom of God and the sons of God. Thus there must also be a form of law working within believers; there must be a law in the kingdom and for the sons.

### **The law of Christ**

This form of law is called the law of Christ because it is the perfect moral capacity of Christ as a man. Christ, having perfectly fulfilled the law, is now the moral standard for all men. Unregenerate people will be judged by that standard on the Day of Judgement and

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<sup>9</sup> 'The law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ,' Gal 3:17.

<sup>10</sup> 'What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come,' Gal 3:19.

<sup>11</sup> 'The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ,' Jn 1:17.

<sup>12</sup> 'The law of a fleshly commandment,' Heb 7:16.

<sup>13</sup> 'Who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.' 2 Cor 3:6.

<sup>14</sup> 'Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good,' Rm 7:12.

<sup>15</sup> 'For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous,' Rm 5:19.

<sup>16</sup> '(For if by the one man's offence death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) ... as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord,' Rm 5:17, 21.

<sup>17</sup> 'Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom,' Matt 4:23.

<sup>18</sup> 'From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"', Matt 4:17.

believers are called to live up to that standard, which is far higher than the Law of Moses. Now, even the depths of our motivations are to be perfect as well as outward actions.

Because Christ has brought in a new covenant of grace, being the fulfilment of the covenant made with Abraham, the Gospel, there is power to obey included within his gift. This is centred in the gift of the Holy Spirit to the people of God to seal them and to indwell them forever. This was not available in the Old Covenant.<sup>19</sup> It is by the power of the Spirit that believers fulfil the law of Christ. As they walk in the Spirit they bear the fruit of the Spirit, which is Christ manifested. This is the law being fulfilled.

Thus believers, though not under Mosaic Law, are under the law of Christ and never cease to be law-abiders as they abide in Christ. Therefore, all forms of antinomianism fail to see that walking in the Spirit is actually obeying God's law. Being in the New Covenant is not being without law, but being in-law in Christ:

To those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law [lit. 'in-law'] toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law. 1 Cor 9:21<sup>20</sup>

Notice that Paul says that he is not without law towards God. All those who teach that we are dead to the law and thus have no need of any law are antinomians and fail to see what the law of Christ is. Being dead to the law is being dead to the external form of Mosaic Law; now believers are in the New Covenant and keep Christ's law by the Spirit. Thus all the principles of moral law found in Genesis and in the Mosaic Law will be obeyed because the moral law is eternal.

### **Moral law**

God never left his creation without law. At the beginning Adam and his progeny knew the moral law of God because God explained it and we see repeatedly in Genesis the application of laws later made clear in the Mosaic Law. For instance the need to provide a sacrifice to atone for sin committed is clearly represented in the patriarchs and this was based on knowledge of sin – breaking of God's law. This moral law is perceived to a certain degree by all men from Adam onwards and is witnessed in the conscience. What the Mosaic Law did was to codify this in some detail and attach penalties; the moral law was not changed because it is God's will for man.

While the external form of the Mosaic Law is cancelled after the cross, the moral law is eternal and never changes. God never changes his mind about what is proper ethical behaviour for mankind. For believers, this moral law is absorbed into the law of Christ because Christ (as a man) obeyed all these principles of moral law. Believers who walk in the Spirit and abide in Christ fulfil the moral law.

Therefore, some aspects of New Covenant Theology are wrong when it insists that only the ethical commands repeated in the NT are to be kept. This, for instance, fails to see a need to forbid incest or bestiality since the OT forbidding of these is not repeated in the NT. This is foolish. Basic principles of moral law are eternal and are all subsumed in the law of Christ and do not need detailing.

### **No more theocracy needed**

Since the whole dispensation of the Old Covenant (law, sacrifices, Israel etc.) has been cancelled, therefore the whole idea of a theocracy has also been cancelled. God is no longer

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<sup>19</sup> 'He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified,' Jn 7:39.

<sup>20</sup> *Robertson's Word Pictures*: 'Not being an outlaw of God, but an inlaw of Christ' (Evans, Estius has it *exlex, inlex*).

concerned with a material kingdom on the earth any more (this is why all Postmillennial and Dispensational ideas are false). The whole thing has been subsumed into Christ and fulfilled.

Christ is the centre of everything in God's plan. What occurred before Christ was pointing towards him and preparing people for him. After the cross and ascension, everything is now centred in Christ and this is done spiritually – hence the post-ascension reign and ministry of the Spirit. The outpouring of the Spirit is the central motif of the New Covenant and nothing could happen until he was outpoured. Thus the apostles had to wait for him before they could do anything.

Through the Spirit we are able to be the body of Christ on earth and manifest him through spiritual means. Thus the persecution of the church by Paul is a persecution of Christ himself.<sup>21</sup>

Instead of a material theocracy on earth, now Christ is the whole theocracy. It is a kingdom in Christ; a heavenly, spiritual kingdom. The kingdom is in him since the whole church is in him. And yet the kingdom is also in us because Christ is in us.<sup>22</sup>

At the baptism of the Spirit<sup>23</sup> all the church was placed into Christ.<sup>24</sup> Now the central apostolic thesis, the basis of all grace, is that Christ is in us and this gives us hope of glory.<sup>25</sup> Thus all work done for Christ in the body actually glorifies Christ through our union with him. This is what grace does.

Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thess 1:11-12

There is no need of any material theocracy; a much greater thing is already active on the earth – believers united to Christ as the body of Christ. Trying to establish a Christian utopian state on earth today is utterly pointless. A greater thing is already here – the kingdom of God spiritually active in Christ and his people. Thus all earthly millennial hopes, all world-changing activities, all praying for national Israel, are utterly pointless. That thinking is Old Covenant and it is dead.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

We could continue to elucidate the blessings of the New Covenant in Christ by the Spirit, but the apostles already did that in providing the NT. The theological basis for apostolic teaching is the 'in-Christ' relationship, which is the core of the New Covenant.

We have seen that Mosaic Law, and the intrinsic Old Covenant that is attached to it, demands a theocracy; which is why Covenant Theologians have tended towards this in one form or another, even if they just demand that Mosaic law is the standard of Christian ethics. Those that do this just become more and more fixated on the Old Covenant and

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<sup>21</sup> 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' Acts 26:14.

<sup>22</sup> 'The kingdom of God is within you,' Lk 17:21.

<sup>23</sup> 'By one Spirit we were all baptised into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit,' 1 Cor 12:13.

<sup>24</sup> 'As many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ,' Gal 3:27.

<sup>25</sup> 'For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory,' Col 3:3-4.

<sup>26</sup> This is why all attempts in history to establish a material kingdom, or a Christian civic utopia, have not only failed, but failed disastrously.

miss the realm of the Spirit. At worst they become Erastian, mixing church and state and make God's purpose materialistic

This then provokes a wrong reaction about what is considered to be the work of the Spirit in Charismaticism. This is also looking to a fleshly, earthly application of spiritual power instead of understanding that the kingdom is spiritual. Charismaticism is merely making supposed spiritual ministry and gifts material, observable, felt, and applied on earth.<sup>27</sup> These too lead to millennial utopianism, seeking to change the world to be a heavenly kingdom on earth. All Charismatic teaching on automatic healing, creative words of faith, visualisation of desires, faith expectation of money and health etc. are false materialistic concepts of God's kingdom purposes and a focus on man. They fail to understand the spirituality of the kingdom centred in Christ.

All of this fails to recognise what Christ has done in bringing in a New Covenant and they place other emphases in front of believers instead of Christ himself. The central error in the churches today is taking the focus away from Christ and putting something else in his place, whether that is Moses (the Old Covenant), or men, Israel, or gifts, hedonism or taking over the earth.

Christ is God's only Son and is also the Kingdom of God. Any theology that calls something else God's son or God's kingdom is a lie (e.g. Dispensationalism or Christian Zionism). Everything that went before (Moses, Israel, law) is now abolished in its earthly form and subsumed into Christ (this is the whole message of Hebrews).

Therefore, those who are in Christ (the church, the elect of all nations) are in the Kingdom and made sons because they are in Christ. This occurred in the baptism of the Spirit initiated by his outpouring at Pentecost. The Jewish theocracy is cancelled and all forms of theocracy are finished; the reign of God is now in Christ and also in the people in Christ.

This reign is spiritual. It is mediated by the Holy Spirit working within believers. All the forms of grace applied to believers are spiritual and not material or earthly. It is a heavenly kingdom.<sup>28</sup> This means that the law, a constituent of kingdom life, of sonship, is now spiritual. It is the application of the law of Christ (the height of moral law) manifested in New Covenant people through the work of the spirit.

Thus practical observance of the law of Christ is nominated in the NT as fruit – the fruit of the Spirit. Under Moses the observance of law was work, and it was a work that never succeeded in doing good as a result of sin. But fruit is not produced by human energy but by the inner working of spiritual life in believers in Christ. Fruit is what counts because it is Christ himself.

Brethren, we must not look to earthly things any more. Even we ourselves are no longer earthly but are new creatures in Christ. We must not seek to build an earthly kingdom, whether it is Jewish, Charismatic, or Reformed Theonomic. We must not resurrect external Mosaic Law. What we must do is focus our attention on Christ and see that he is

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<sup>27</sup> Thus Charismatic worship is not spiritual but emotional and mystical, soulish. It is dominated by soulish things – music, repetitive singing, hypnotic suggestibility, building up to an emotional climax etc. Even in the OT genuinely spiritual men could worship in the Spirit at a time of great crisis with no music or excitement. Supposedly spiritual leadership, such as by apostles and prophets, is not such thing but merely authoritarianism. There is nothing miraculous in even the most mystical of them.

<sup>28</sup> 'Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."' Jn 18:36.

the fulfilment of all God's purposes. The old has gone and the new has come.<sup>29</sup> Christ is all.<sup>30</sup> Christ is pre-eminent.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new,' 2 Cor 5:17.

<sup>30</sup> 'There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all,' Col 3:11.

<sup>31</sup> 'And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence,' Col 1:18.