

SERIES: Ten Stupid Things People Do to Mess Up Their Lives

SERMON: **The Rest of the Law**

SCRIPTURE: Exodus through Deuteronomy

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DATE: August 30, 2009

The Ten Commandments, which we have been studying all summer, represent only a small fraction of the total legal system God gave to Israel through Moses. They constitute just 10 of the 613 rules and regulations that fill more than half of the first five books of the Bible. If, as we suggested when we started this series, the Ten Commandments are sadly neglected in many of our evangelical churches, how much more is that neglect obvious when it comes to the rest of the Mosaic Law! Almost no one preaches on it, and even many faithful, regular Bible readers skip over the last half of Exodus, Leviticus, and a good part of the rest of the Pentateuch because they consider it a graveyard of confusing and irrelevant rules and regulations.

I am not going to be able to correct our widespread ignorance on this topic in one message, but my hope is that we will at least come away with a basic grasp of this major Scriptural topic and that some of us will be motivated to go back and study it further on their own.

The Mosaic Law is a very controversial theme in biblical studies. What was its purpose and to whom does it apply?

Some Christians seem to have the notion that the Mosaic Law was God's plan of salvation in the OT, while faith in Christ is His plan in the NT. That is a serious misunderstanding. The Law was never designed to save anyone. Salvation has always been by grace through faith in God's redemptive sacrifice. The OT saints looked forward to Messiah's coming; we look back.

But the Law, while never designed to save, did have at least four primary purposes. First, it was designed to enable a large and unwieldy group of people—perhaps over 2 million—to survive as nomads in a desert for 40 years, and then to survive as newcomers in a land with many hostile neighbors. One can only imagine the chaos that would have resulted had the Israelites tackled the desert without a clear set of behavioral guidelines. Just think of the many contagious diseases that could have wiped out large numbers if extreme hygienic measures were not enforced. So the first purpose of the Mosaic Law was just plain survival of the nation.

Second, the Law showed the people how to achieve the good life, a life of health, happiness and fulfillment. All of God's laws in one way or another protected the people from harm and led to prosperity, emotional well-being, and general enjoyment of life. They didn't always see it that way, of course, anymore than children today always view their parents' rules as beneficial.

Third, the Law was designed to make Israel sufficiently different from the pagan nations around them that they would not become assimilated. The Law assured their distinctiveness in many areas.

And fourth, the Law was designed to bring God's people to the end of their rope and drive them to

lean solely on His grace. No one, no matter how hard he or she tried, was able to keep the Law in its entirety. And so the sacrificial system was instituted to provide atonement. In the sacrifices the worshiper was supposed to see, not a means of excusing his failure, but rather a picture of God's undeserved mercy and grace. This would also prepare God's people for the death of Christ as the ultimate, complete, and final sacrifice for sin. We'll come back to this later.

Now the second question, more controversial than the first, is "To whom does the Law apply?" I would suggest to you that there are two extreme views among evangelical Christians. One is called Reconstructionism or Dominion Theology or Theonomy, and it has become quite popular in some very conservative Reformed circles. Among its better known leaders are Rousas J. Rushdoony, Gary North, and Greg Bahnsen. According to this view, at the time of creation God gave man an eternally binding mandate to subdue the earth and establish the Kingdom of God on this planet. As a result of the Fall, Adam failed to fulfill this covenant mandate, and Satan began to dominate many things in the world.

God then chose one particular nation, Israel, to be His instrument to restore dominion and gave them His law as their guide. But Israel also failed to fulfill the mandate, for the Jewish people disobeyed the Mosaic Law, and were therefore permanently excommunicated from their covenant position. In Israel's place God passed this kingdom mandate to the Church. Christians must fulfill what Adam and the nation of Israel failed to do—practice dominion over secular culture and every sphere of society, demanding submission to the Ten Commandments, as well as to the moral and civil aspects of the Mosaic Law. God intends the Mosaic Law to be the rule of life for all people, in every culture, and in every age of history.¹ (By the way, you've perhaps heard of radical Muslims who demand submission to Sha-ria law. Well, in a sense the Reconstructionists are the Christian counterpart, demanding submission to the Law of Moses).

At the opposite end of the spectrum from Reconstructionism is a movement called Classical Dispensationalism, which in its more extreme form teaches that the Mosaic Law has *no* application today—not even the Ten Commandments. They believe the Mosaic Law was completely superceded by the Law of Christ and all we can learn from Moses is how much we have to be thankful for that we're not still under the regulations he gave.

Instead of believing that the Church is charged with *reconstructing* society, Dispensationalists were concerned only with *evangelizing* society. After all, this world is all going up in smoke one of these days, so why polish the brass on the Titanic? Besides Christians are going to escape through the Rapture just before the great conflagration. Classical Dispensationalists tended to be pessimistic and passive about the moral and social ills around them, often complaining about them but rejecting activism to correct them. (Thankfully there is a more recent movement called Progressive Dispensationalism, which has brought balance to some of the more extreme views of the Classical Dispensationalists).

The Deconstructionist sees only continuity between the Law of Moses and the Church today. The Classical Dispensationalist sees only discontinuity. In case you hadn't guessed it yet, I accept neither Reconstructionism nor Classical Dispensationalism as the proper explanation of the Church's

relationship to the Mosaic Law. I suggest an alternative view. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are not bound contractually to the law of Moses as Israel was. We are, however, under the “Law of Christ” (1 Corinthians 9:21). But what is the connection between the law of Moses and the law of Christ? Jesus stated that He did not come to abolish the law of Moses but to fulfill it—that is, to bring it to its complete expression and intended goal (Matthew 5:17). So, our approach as NT believers should be to interpret and apply the law of Moses through the lens of Jesus’ teaching and ministry. As Dr. Craig Blomberg explains, “Every OT commandment must today be filtered through a grid of fulfillment in Christ to see how its application may have changed.”ⁱⁱ

But when we do what Dr. Bloomberg challenges us to do, we discover *both* continuity *and* discontinuity. Jesus and His apostles repeated and even intensified some of the commands God gave through Moses (e.g. adultery and murder) and abrogated others (strict Sabbath observance, dietary rules, and animal sacrifices). Yet there is a large body of laws which fall into neither category (i.e. not clearly continued or clearly discontinued). These we must study in context, trying to determine the moral principle behind them.

I believe the Mosaic Law has much to teach us (as does all of Scripture, according to 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Using the lens of the NT, we should seek to discover how the whole Law provides “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” for a follower of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, I believe the Christian does have a cultural mandate to influence his society, to be the salt of the earth, to protect the environment, and he should be concerned that the institutions of society reflect the Laws of God as much as possible. The Mosaic Law includes principles that no society can afford to ignore, though many do to their own great harm. In fact, the very success of the American experiment over the past 233 years is due in large part to the fact that biblical laws and principles were part and parcel of our founding documents. We should not lightly give those up, no matter how loudly the ACLU demands that we do so.

However, I do not believe this cultural mandate is to turn the nations of the earth into theocracies. Jesus and His apostles never tried to overthrow the Roman government or its institutions. Nor will the Kingdom of God be finally established until Jesus Himself returns to establish it.

Now I want to turn to the content of the Mosaic Law itself so that we can familiarize ourselves somewhat with what it actually covered.

The Mosaic Law covered virtually every area of a Jewish person’s life.

It has generally been divided into three parts: the moral law, the civil and criminal law and the religious and ceremonial law.

The moral law covered ten areas essential to everyone's relationships with God and with man.

We have preached on every one of these Ten Commandments over the past three months, and while we have not exhausted them, I trust we were able to demonstrate that they transcend all cultures and all times, and that none of them can be ignored with impunity. A second major part of the Mosaic

Law is,

The civil and criminal law dealt with a number of areas of every individual's personal life.

1. Property and possessions. Exodus 22:1 contains a typical law regarding the right of property: "If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep." The difference is due to the relative importance of the two animals to a Jewish farmer; the more valuable the property stolen, the greater the penalty on the thief. Think about what it might do to car theft in our country if every thief were required to pay back five cars for each one stolen.

The next verse says, "If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed; but if it happens *after sunrise*, he is guilty of bloodshed." The point seems to be that at night one doesn't know if the thief is just after one's property or might be armed and violent, so extreme measures of self-defense are legitimate. However, in broad daylight one could presumably tell whether the thief was armed or not, and therefore killing him was not allowed. The defensive measure must fit the crime.

2. Health and diet is a second area of concern. In Ex. 22:31 God's people are forbidden to eat the meat of an animal torn by wild beasts. In other words, a Jewish restaurant would never be named *The Road Kill Cafe*, like the one on Hiway 62 in Eureka Springs, AR. Presumably this is because dead meat can quickly become infected with germs. In Lev. 11 they are told they can't eat pigs, camels or rabbits, sushi, or most birds and insects, except for locusts, katydids, crickets and grasshoppers. As far as I am concerned those could have been included, too.

Apparently behind all these dietary rules was God's desire for His people to be healthy. Remember that Israel was a nomadic people living in a desert, constantly moving, lacking refrigeration, and often lacking adequate cooking facilities. Apparently by the time of Christ, when Israel is no longer nomadic, such rules are no longer necessary, for Christ and the Apostles make it clear that God's people can eat anything they want so long as they are thankful for it.

Another major health concern in the Mosaic Law was infectious skin diseases and bodily discharges, and Leviticus 13-15 provides extremely detailed regulations concerning diagnosis and treatment of these problems. All of this was to prevent contagious diseases from spreading through the camp. If something like swine flu can be such a danger to modern society with all our advanced medical knowledge, imagine the damage that could have come to the Israelites during their march through the desert if they did not take extreme precautions.

3. Work. Scattered through the Mosaic Law are a number of regulations for employers and employees. For example, Leviticus 19:13 says, "Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight." In verse 33 of the same chapter we read, "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt." (By the way, I assume this is talking about legal aliens, not illegal ones, for that's certainly what the Israelites were in Egypt. Unfortunately some liberal

churches used this text to establish sanctuaries for illegal aliens).

In Deut. 15:14 the rule is established that when a slave is set free, as he must be after a maximum of six years, he must not be sent away empty-handed. After all, what good is freedom if one doesn't have the necessities of life?

4. Interest and usury. In Exodus 22:25 we read, "If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a money-lender; charge him no interest." Later, the people are forbidden to practice usury, which is defined as *exorbitant* interest, even with foreigners. In other words, they were not to charge *any* interest to a fellow-believer, nor *excessive* interest to anyone.

5. Marriage and family. These laws deal with whom one may marry, how children are to behave and when divorce was allowable. By the way, divorce was never encouraged, and the restrictions on it were tighter than for any other ancient people. Rules are discussed in a number of passages, particularly Deut. 24, where the regulation is established that a person may not go back to a previous spouse if there has been an intervening marriage. This was intended to prevent musical chairs in marriage, i.e. it prohibits a man from trying out a new wife but keeping the first one on the line in case the new one didn't work out.

6. Sexual behavior. This is another major concern in the Mosaic Law. Chapters 18 and 20 of Leviticus offer a long list of unlawful sexual relations, with attendant punishments, including sex with close relatives, with animals, and with individuals of the same gender. These rules clearly identify such actions as detestable and deserving of the most severe judgment from God.

As homosexuality has become a *cause celebre* in our culture, many self-proclaimed Bible scholars have performed amazing contortions on these portions of God's Word in an effort to prove that homosexuality is not really forbidden. One of their favorite claims is that God is forbidding only heterosexuals from committing homosexual acts. Another is to claim that only homosexual promiscuity is being forbidden, not monogamous relationships between homosexuals. But there is no doubt that all homosexual acts are forbidden in the Mosaic Law.ⁱⁱⁱ

The religious and ceremonial law.

1. Sabbath observance was, of course, required by the Fourth Commandment, but elsewhere in the Mosaic Law it is expanded upon significantly. Not only is every seventh day to be a day of rest, but every seventh year as well. Every 49th year (7 x 7) was a year of Jubilee (Lev. 25), in which all prisoners went free, all mortgages were canceled, and all land returned to its original owner, etc. Everyone received a fresh start. I strongly suspect our psychological and emotional health would be a lot better if we all took every seventh year off. But for that to work it required that people save up during the other six years so they could survive the seventh. I doubt if that would ever work in a nation that increasingly expects the government to support them from cradle to grave.

2. Feasts and festivals were another important part of the ceremonial law. Three of them are mentioned in Exodus 23 and others are added in Leviticus 23. There was Passover, Unleavened

Bread, First Fruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles. These were all designed to be reminders to the Israelites of God's great acts in calling them to be a people for Himself. It is also true that every one of these feasts finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ, as indicated in the NT. We too need special days of remembrance; they become part of the rhythm of life, reminding us of God's providential acts in history.

3. Sacrifices. Beginning in Leviticus chapter 1 we find detailed information about the Burnt Offering, the Grain Offering, the Fellowship Offering, the Sin Offering, and the Guilt Offering. Numbers 15 adds a number of supplementary offerings, plus offerings for unintentional sins. Each of these sacrifices had a separate purpose and was important in the establishment of an open and clean relationship with God. All pointed to the fact that God's grace and forgiveness are essential to the very survival of a sinful people. They also found their ultimate fulfillment in Christ, according to the NT.

4. Tithes and offerings were expected of God's people, as noted in Deuteronomy 14. The tithe was not 10%, as commonly thought, but actually nearly 23% of income, but it must be noted that this money was used for more than religious ministry; it paid for welfare and other essential government services in lieu of an income tax. In addition, there were special offerings from time to time through which a Jewish person could express gratitude to God for unique blessings.

5. The tabernacle and priesthood take up a large portion of the Mosaic Law. Starting in Exodus 25 and consuming significant parts of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, we have the account of the design and building of the Tabernacle, plus detailed regulations about how it was to be moved and how worship was to be conducted. God tolerated no lack of attention to detail, because the Tabernacle was the place where He planned to meet with His people on a regular basis.

Such a holy place demanded a holy priesthood to administer the religious rites and ceremonies, and here too God specified very clear and detailed means for consecrating priests and maintaining their purity. When there was moral failure among the priesthood, God was swift and severe in His judgment, as is obvious from the story of Nadab and Abihu, as recorded in Lev. 10.^{iv}

When Jesus ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit, God's dwelling shifted from the Temple as a building to the body of the believer and the body of Christ, the local church. The NT also teaches the priesthood of every believer.

Now I want to mention briefly that . . .

The Mosaic Law contained some troubling aspects, at least to those of us with a 20th century perspective.

Sexism is discernible in some of the laws, that is, the apparent treatment of women as inferior to men. For example, in Lev. 12 a woman is considered ritually unclean for a week if she gives birth to a son but for two weeks if the child is a girl. Then there is a special test, and a rather strange one at that (involving holy water mixed with dust from the tabernacle floor), to determine if a wife has been

unfaithful to her husband but no comparable test for the husband. You can read about it in Numbers 5:11ff. In Numbers 30 a woman's vow can be nullified by her father or her husband, but not a man's. Divorce is also easier for a husband to obtain than for a wife.

While I don't have an adequate explanation for some of these laws, we must not overlook the important fact that discrimination against women is definitely the exception rather than the rule. The Mosaic Law went much further than any other ancient legal code in protecting the rights of women. For example, Ex. 21:15 allows the death penalty for anyone who attacks either his father or his mother; they are considered to be equally deserving of respect and honor.

Slavery is another troubling issue in the Mosaic Law. It is not only recognized but approved as an appropriate institution. In Exodus 21 regulations are provided for Hebrew slaves as well as foreign ones. Slavery is such a repulsive idea to us today that it's difficult not to be embarrassed that our Bible doesn't roundly condemn it (in either the OT or the NT). But I don't think we need to be particularly defensive about this issue for several reasons.

First, virtually every society in human history has practiced slavery, including our own up until just 145 years ago. Second, the slavery allowed in the Mosaic Law was not the horrible racist institution practiced by modern colonial powers. It more often approximated contract labor, though the contract could not be broken by the employee. Third, slavery in Israel was, for the most part, voluntary and temporary, and the slave's rights were protected in many different ways. In Deut. 23:15, e.g., it says, "If a slave has taken refuge with you, do not hand him over to his master. Let him live among you wherever he likes and in whatever town he chooses. Do not oppress him." No other ancient society had such protections for slaves.

The law of retaliation is a third issue that bothers some people. I'm talking about "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, etc." This is found in Ex. 21:23-25, as well as in Lev. and Deut. While on the surface this legal principle sounds barbaric and seems to constitute a license for personal revenge, that is not at all the case. It was a rule given to the civil magistrates to guide them in cases of civil dispute, not a law to justify private vendettas. Furthermore, Dr. Walter Kaiser, leading Old Testament scholar, argues that the law of retaliation was actually meant to prevent the punishment from exceeding the crime. In other words, an eye could not be taken when only a tooth was lost.^v

The death penalty is clearly allowed under the Mosaic Law for a wide variety of offenses. Capital crimes included:

- premeditated murder
- kidnaping
- adultery
- homosexuality
- incest
- bestiality
- incorrigible delinquency
- striking or cursing parents
- offering human sacrifice

false prophecy
 blasphemy
 profaning the Sabbath
 sacrificing to false gods
 magic and divination
 unchastity
 rape of an engaged virgin

Such frequent use of capital punishment seems barbaric to many today. Indeed, many in our society argue against it for even the most evil terrorist. But we must realize that the Mosaic Law did not require the death penalty for these crimes. Only for premeditated murder was a substitute payment unacceptable (Num. 35:31). Presumably sentences for all the other capital crimes could be commuted, and usually were, if the judge determined there were extenuating circumstances or the perpetrator could be rehabilitated. The possibility of the death penalty, however, marks the extreme seriousness of these sins in the mind of God and served as a strong deterrent to these crimes.

Laws with purposes we cannot understand. For example, Leviticus 19:19: “Keep my decrees. Do not mate different kinds of animals. Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed. Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.” Then in verse 27 we read, “Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard.” In Deut 22:12 the Israelites are commanded, “Make tassels on the four corners of the cloak you wear.” And Ex. 23:19 prohibits the boiling of a goat in its mother's milk.

We honestly don't know the reason for some of these laws. Skeptics love to focus on these unusual laws and call Christians hypocrites because they don't give equal attention to these laws as they do to laws about homosexuality, for example. The fact is these strange laws are never repeated in the NT, while the laws about homosexuality are clearly affirmed there. I am confident that God requires nothing of anyone without a good reason, it's just that some of the reasons are no longer discernible to us.

The Mosaic Law contained some principles any modern society would do well to adopt.

Personal responsibility. Sadly, our society has gone a long way toward eliminating, or at least minimizing, personal responsibility. We have no-fault insurance, no-fault divorce, psychiatric defenses for brutal crimes, and many other evidences that personal responsibility is no longer taken seriously. The Mosaic Law, on the other hand, constantly stressed personal responsibility. Each person was responsible for his animals, for his property, and for his actions to make sure that other people weren't unnecessarily injured. That extended to even requiring a certain kind of roof structure so someone who happened to be up on your roof didn't fall off (Deut. 22:8). I believe personal responsibility is a legal concept that should be given much greater consideration in our judicial system.

Restitution is another principle that modern man should sit up and take note of. Charles Colson, the notorious convicted criminal from Nixon's cabinet, who has become a great minister of the Gospel and advocate for prisoners, has argued strongly for restitution rather than incarceration of most

non-violent criminals. What sense does it make to put an able-bodied man or woman in jail for stealing a car? Why not make him work to fix the damage or to repay the victim for his trouble? Obviously, we couldn't do away with all prisons because there are some people who are dangerous and there are others who, though non-violent, are career criminals. But I'm convinced that the principle of restitution is a valid one. It's found all through the Mosaic code.

Personal property rights is a third principle worth noting. The Bible makes it explicitly clear that God owns everything but that He has entrusted property and possessions into the hands of individuals to be enjoyed and managed well. Any attempt by to seize personal property, even by government, is immoral, and counterproductive to boot.

Protection of the helpless is a final principle very clearly spelled out in the Mosaic Law, and this, too, cannot be ignored without severe consequences. One of the common complaints about justice in America is that it tends to protect the wealthy and well-connected at the expense of the poor and powerless, and certainly there is some truth in that allegation. Not so with the Mosaic Law. Debtors are protected, slaves are protected, the prisoner is protected, the poor are protected, and the immigrant is protected. For example, look at Exodus 22:22: "Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless."

Farmers were not allowed to harvest their fields completely but were required to leave the edges and the corners for the poor and the wild animals. Even the unborn are protected. In a very important passage in Exodus 21:22-25, the unborn child is granted the full rights of personhood.

It is my hope that this brief survey of the Mosaic Law will help you to make more sense of this large portion of the OT and may even motivate you to investigate these issues more on your own. My final point this morning is that

More than anything else, the Mosaic Law pointed to the need of a Savior.

We mentioned earlier that one of the purposes of the Law was to drive God's people to their knees in utter frustration at their personal failure to achieve purity and integrity and holiness. It's just human nature that we cannot keep God's laws perfectly. There is something in each of us that pushes the envelope, causes us to make exceptions for ourselves, and then moves us to justify and excuse ourselves afterwards. When that happens, we need someone to bail us out.

The Scripture says in Gal. 4:4, "When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." In effect God comes and says, "I understand your weakness and I have provided a solution for the one who admits his weakness and desires My help. I have sent a Lamb to be the final, complete, and never-to-be-repeated sacrifice for sins, and that Lamb is my Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He died for you, He paid for your sin, and He is able to release you from the penalty of the Law when you turn to Him in faith for eternal life."

1. Enforcement of the Mosaic Law involves the application of the death penalty, not only for murder and kidnaping, but for adultery, fornication, rebellion in adolescent children, blasphemy, apostasy, etc. A reconstructed society would regard dissenters and heretics as treasonous criminals. It would be characterized by the rights of private property, a free market economy, tight limitations on debt, a monetary system based on the gold standard, a social welfare system financed by the tithe rather than taxes, restitution rather than imprisonment for many criminals, and voluntary slavery as a means of repaying a wrong. As one might expect, Reconstructionists tend to be much more activist in regard to the key social, political, and moral issues of our day than the average evangelical.

ii. These thoughts are largely taken from an unpublished article by Steve Mathewson entitled, *Preaching the Gospel from the Law of Moses*.

iii. But some will argue, “We don’t continue to apply the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic Law; why should we continue to apply its sanctions against homosexuality?” The obvious answer is that the NT Apostles specifically *removed* the dietary restrictions, while they *reinforced* the teachings against homosexuality. Romans 1, for example, is every bit as forceful in its denunciation of homosexual behavior as is the Mosaic Law.

No doubt some of you have heard about the little booklet entitled, “Everything Jesus said about homosexuality.” You open it up and the pages are all blank. The point they are trying to make is that Jesus never condemned homosexuality because He never even addressed the topic. Well, that’s true. But He did affirm the total truthfulness of Scripture. More importantly, the words of the Apostles are as authoritative as the words of Jesus. So it really doesn’t matter if Jesus Himself addressed a topic; if His sent ones, His apostles, addressed it, they did so with His authority.

iv. Interestingly, most Reconstructionists do not want to apply the religious and ceremonial laws to the church today, though some advocate observance of the feasts and festivals. I don't know of any, for example, who are interested in reinstating the sacrificial system. But this seems to me to be inconsistent, for the religious and ceremonial laws are scattered through the civil laws and there seems to be no logical reason for accepting one without the other.

4. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament*, Intersity Press, 1988, 72ff.