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WHERE DOES THE LAW FIT IN?

A question that was sent to me goes like this:

"Exactly where does the Law fit into things? For instance, why encourage people to obey Leviticus 11 and not Leviticus 12-15? I am looking for an orderly and logical way to approach the use of THE ENTIRE LAW."

That seems like a fair question; so let's see how we should answer it.

WHAT IS "LAW"?

The first point to understand is exactly what law is. As Mr. Armstrong used to explain: LAW refers to RULES OF CONDUCT. The "laws" of baseball, or any other sport, are the RULES of the game. Human societies either have "laws" or they break down. The laws need not exist in written form, but there must be "rules", or else chaos results.

The next point to keep in mind is this: Laws in and by themselves are of no value unless there is a power and authority to ENFORCE their observance. Even when there are some laws, but there is no authority to enforce them, then anarchy results, as was the case in Israel some of the time during the period of the judges:

In those days [there was] no king in Israel: every man did [that which was] right in his own eyes.
(Judges 21:25)

The chaos, insecurity and confusion that results from the lack of laws is totally contrary to God in every way.

For GOD IS NOT [THE AUTHOR] OF CONFUSION, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. (1 Corinthians 14:33)

GOD IS A LAWGIVER

The entire creation is based on laws. The Church has explained this many times in the past, though not very often in recent years. We DEPEND on those laws remaining in force for our very existence. You yourself can think of many examples to substantiate this, so I don't need to do this for you.

True Christians understand this and LOVE God for it! We love God for bringing laws into existence and giving us the rules (laws) whereby we can live in the best possible way. This is the way God's people have always viewed God's laws:

MEM. O how love I thy law! it [is] my meditation all the day. (Psalm 119:97)

SAMECH. I hate [vain] thoughts: but thy law do I love. (Psalm 119:113)

I hate and abhor lying: [but] thy law do I love. (Psalm 119:163)

Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them. (Psalm 119:165)

A LOVE for God's laws characterizes God's people. Now why would that be?

EVERYBODY WANTS SOME "LAWS"

There isn't anybody around who wants a total absence of all laws. We don't want people to kill us or steal from us or lie to us or harm us in any way. We want laws that protect us from exploitation by deceitful sales-people. If you send a cheque for \$5000 to some mail-order house for some computer equipment, you will be upset if they keep your money, but don't send you the goods you have paid for. If people cheat us, we want laws that enable us to recover our losses.

ALL LAWS ARE INTENDED TO PRODUCE GOOD RESULTS.

Now when we talk about "GOD'S LAWS", then we are talking about the rules of conduct that God has spelled out for us human beings, which will lead to a full life and happiness if obeyed.

God's laws show us the way that leads to everything good and desirable ...

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, [that] I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: (Deuteronomy 30:19)

God's laws show us the way, where, left to our own devices, we would end up in pain and suffering and misery and confusion.

There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof [are] the ways of death. (Proverbs 16:25)

Through His laws God has lovingly revealed to us how to avoid pain and suffering and, ultimately, eternal death. The very fact that there is such an event as the second death shows that God is very serious about His laws.

John, the Apostle of love, made clear that God's laws are an expression of love:

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. (1 John 5:3)

We should ask ourselves this question:

WHY WOULD GOD EVER WANT TO ABOLISH HIS LAW, OR EVEN A PART OF IT?

People who want to believe that God has abolished a part of His law, or all of it, are expressing an enmity and a hostility to God. They are very carnal and not at all spiritually minded.

Because the carnal mind [is] enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. (Romans 8:7)

To imply that God would abolish His law is an insult to God. God tells us that He is consistent, the same yesterday (in O.T. times), today (in N.T. times) and for ever (after the second coming and on into future eternity).

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. (Hebrews 13:8)

To imply that God would give strict laws to people in Old Testament times, but now give us all kinds of freedoms from these strict laws, makes God partial. It contradicts Hebrews 13:8.

Jesus Christ very clearly said:

... but if thou wilt enter into life, KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS. (Matthew 19:17)

It was the same Christ who said:

THINK NOT THAT I AM COME TO DESTROY THE LAW, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. (Matthew 5:17)

THE PURPOSE OF ALL LAWS

To briefly recap at this point: the purpose for all laws is to reveal and spell out THE WAY that all of humanity can receive the greatest possible benefits. That is why Paul said that the ruler who enforces obedience to laws is the servant (minister) of God:

For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to [execute] wrath upon him that doeth evil. (Romans 13:4)

Can we see what Paul was explaining here? Rulers who punish lawbreakers are acting on behalf of God. God wants lawbreakers to be punished!

People who gladly obey laws have a different spirit from those who want laws to be abolished and declared "obsolete". This is important to understand.

People who gladly obey laws see those laws as an expression of their true FREEDOM. This does not mean that they say: "I am free to obey these laws or to break them." Not at all! What they are saying is: "Obedience to these laws guarantees my freedom ... freedom from fear, from being killed, from being robbed, from being victimized, from being hurt in any way. O how I love these laws that give me these freedoms."

On the other hand, people who want laws to be abolished have a different spirit and a different

motivation. Their motivation comes from a desire to do those things that the laws forbid! It comes from a spirit of rebellion that says: "Don't try to fence me in. Don't tell me what I can't do. I don't accept any restrictions on my conduct and behaviour as binding on me. I want the freedom to decide for myself what is right and what is wrong."

The first attitude represents the spirit of God and the second attitude represents the spirit of Satan. It is as simple as that! The first attitude views God's commandments as defining perfect liberty:

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth [therein], he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. (James 1:25)

Obedience to God's laws ensures continued liberty. It understands that we will be judged by our obedience to this law of liberty, which is expressed in the 10 commandments.

So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. (James 2:12)

The second attitude argues that we need "liberty FROM ALL LAWS"! The desire to break God's laws underlies this attitude. Therefore laws are seen as RESTRICTIVE and those who hold this view promise freedom from the restrictions of God's laws:

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. (2 Peter 2:19)

A MATTER OF PRIORITIES

People who try to tell us that God's laws are done away inevitably drag up some verses from the writings of the Apostle Paul, and wave them around triumphantly like a banner, proclaiming proudly: "Here you are! These verses make clear that Paul taught that the law of God is OBSOLETE".

I get a little angry with that attitude towards the law of God, as I believe God Himself also does.

Let's ask some basic questions: WHO is in charge ... Paul or Jesus Christ? WHO is greater ... Paul or Jesus Christ? WHO laid down the rules ... Paul or Jesus Christ? WHO comes first ... Paul or Jesus Christ?

Does God want you to understand the words of Jesus Christ in terms of what Paul said? Or does God want you to understand the words of Paul in terms of what Christ said? EXACTLY WHO has the preeminence here ... Paul or Jesus Christ?

WHAT IS YOUR ANSWER?

The clear answer to this must be: JESUS CHRIST ALWAYS COMES FIRST!

If you are not prepared to give a clear, unambiguous answer to this question, then you are not being honest! And that would prove that you are ALREADY not subject to the law of God, which forbids dishonesty.

Alright, so you are honest and you acknowledge that Jesus Christ most assuredly has preeminence above Paul, that the words of Jesus Christ most assuredly have preeminence above the sayings of Paul,

that Christ most assuredly is greater than Paul and that we must most assuredly understand the sayings of Paul in terms of what Jesus Christ, the Son of God, said.

Don't come with some ridiculous argument that somehow everything in the Bible is equal. It isn't! The words of Jesus Christ are the words of God! The words of Paul are sometimes just his own opinions. Jesus Christ had perfect understanding. Paul received his understanding from Christ. Jesus Christ has preeminence above all other human beings (He was God and man), including Paul.

Early in His ministry Christ said: THINK NOT that I have come to destroy the Law of God. Later He said: if you want to enter into eternal life, then you must KEEP GOD'S COMMANDMENTS!

The Apostle John confirmed these statements by Jesus Christ, when He wrote:

He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (1 John 2:4)

We have already seen John's definition of godly love, which is keeping God's commandments. Again John is in agreement with the words of Jesus Christ.

THEREFORE it is in the light of these statements by Jesus Christ that the words of Paul must be understood. Christ's statements are plain and clear! Any other approach represents an insult to Jesus Christ, the Son of God!

DO YOU AGREE?

GOD'S LAWS ARE AN EXPRESSION OF GOD'S LOVE

Every responsible parent knows that the rules he or she lays down for the conduct of his or her child are for the benefit of that child. The rules a parent makes are to protect the child from harm and danger.

God's laws are exactly the same! We are God's children. And God has given us, in His supreme love, His laws to gently guide us, like a shepherd guides his sheep, through the valley of death. Without God's laws we would die.

For the wages of sin [is] death; but the gift of God [is] eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

Sin is the breaking of God's laws, remember?

At the end of God's plan of salvation, when every human being who has ever been born will have had a real chance for salvation, then all those who refused to repent of breaking the law of God and voluntarily submitting to God's laws over their lives, will DIE IN THE LAKE OF FIRE.

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. (Revelation 21:8)

These are all examples of breaking the laws of God. And God will surely punish them.

AN EXAMPLE OF ABSURD REASONING

Pasadena is intent on removing obedience to the Sabbath. At this point in time we are the only Sabbath-keeping church on Earth that actively and viciously argues against the binding effect of the fourth commandment. That is weird! It is rebellion and hostility to the law of God, like Romans 8:7 tells us.

The claim is made that the ten commandments AS A PACKAGE ARE OBSOLETE! Only those commandments that are specifically repeated in the New Testament are accepted as still in force.

That is absolutely perverse!

It makes a mockery of Almighty God! It makes God out to be someone who cannot make up His mind as to which laws He wants people to live by. And God will most assuredly not let such insults go unpunished.

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in DAMNABLE HERESIES, even denying the Lord that bought them, AND BRING UPON THEMSELVES SWIFT DESTRUCTION. (2 Peter 2:1)

The 10 commandments, as a package, most assuredly stand! The 10 commandments, including the Sabbath commandment, explain how to love God above all else, and how to love our neighbours as ourselves.

The reasoning that Jesus Christ only kept the Sabbath because He was born under the Old Covenant is perverse. Understand something about God:

GOD NEVER APPLIES DIFFERENT STANDARDS TO THOSE PEOPLE WHO ARE BEING TRIED AND TESTED FOR THE SAME OPPORTUNITIES!

Understand that every single human being who will be in the first resurrection was required by God to live according to the terms and conditions of the new covenant. There will not be anybody in the first resurrection, who will have gotten there because he lived by nothing more than the terms of the old covenant.

CAN WE UNDERSTAND THIS?

Look at Hebrews chapter 11 ... Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc., will only be in the first resurrection because they lived by the terms of the new covenant. These individuals most assuredly had the Holy Spirit of God and they lived by the spiritual intent of God's laws. That is the only way to develop the holy righteous character that is a prerequisite for a part in the first resurrection.

People who will have a part in the same resurrection will have had access to the same forms of help from God and they will have been expected by God to live by the same rules.

Keeping the Sabbath has nothing to do with whether people lived before or after the ministry of Jesus Christ. God's laws represent God's way of life, the rules God lives by. The ten commandments plus the statutes and judgments of God expound that way of life in a context for physical, mortal human beings. That is why we have said that all of God's laws put together teach us HOW to love God and HOW to love our neighbour. That is what we saw in 1 John 5:3.

WHY NEW LAWS ARE CREATED

Every nation is making new laws all the time. Why is this so? This is because new circumstances and conditions arise, and the new laws are an attempt to spell out the rules that are to apply to these new conditions. Prior to the age of air travel there was no need for any laws regulating air traffic. But with today's volume of air traffic, specific laws to strictly regulate this traffic are absolutely imperative. Conditions are different from 100 years ago.

Some laws are going to apply all the time. Other laws may only exist for a very limited time. In many countries the laws of taxation are changed every year, but the law that defines murder as a crime remains on the law books permanently. Even if these different laws are mentioned in the same context (i.e. laws of taxation and prosecution for murder), it is still understood that the one set may be changed from year to year, without implying that the law against murder is subject to the same frequent changes.

Let's understand how this applies in the Bible.

PERMANENT LAWS AND TEMPORARY LAWS

The two great principles of Matthew 22:36-40 are expanded into the 10 commandments in Exodus chapter 20. They are an expression of the mind of God.

The Sabbath was created when man was created, and all ten of the commandments have been in force (whether obeyed or not) since the creation of man. These laws will ALL continue to be in force as long as there are physical, mortal human beings in existence. They are an expression of God's way of life, applied to human circumstances. They are independent of any conditions that may prevail in the human sphere at any given time.

To this foundation of laws God later ADDED very specific laws, to be in force for only a limited period of time. These added laws were conditional on certain factors being present. They were closely tied to these factors.

These are the laws that Paul explained were ADDED BECAUSE THE OTHER LAWS HAD BEEN TRANSGRESSED! Notice very carefully:

Wherefore then [serveth] the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; [and it was] ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. (Galatians 3:19)

Paul is here speaking about the purpose of the sacrificial and the ceremonial and ritualistic laws, which some people were pressuring the non-Jewish Christians in Galatia to accept as still binding.

Notice the following points in this verse:

- 1) These ritualistic laws were not given originally. They were only later "added".
- 2) The reason they were added to the spiritual law already in force was because that spiritual law had been broken by the people.
- 3) These ritualistic laws were added with a distinct time limit. They were added "till the seed should come". They were added with the specific intention of being in force only until Christ's first coming.

4) These ritualistic laws had been given through the hands of a mediator, Moses, who mediated between God and the people of Israel.

The laws Paul is here in Galatians chapter 3 speaking about are different from the law he speaks about in Romans chapter 7:

Wherefore the law [is] holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. (Romans 7:12)

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. (Romans 7:14)

THE LAWS THAT ARE DONE AWAY

In New Testament times the ones who were more familiar with all of the laws in the Old Testament were the Jews in the Church. They understood the laws far better than the non-Jews who had been baptized. Notice that I said that the Jews in the Church understood all these laws better. I did not say that they understood which laws were still binding, and which ones were now no longer in force. They simply understood "better" what all of these laws required.

Thus it was to the Jews in the Church that Paul explained which of the laws in the Old Testament were no longer binding on the Church. We find this in the Book of Hebrews. The context is about the Tabernacle (later the Temple) and the priesthood and the duties of the priesthood. Notice chapter 9:

The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: (Hebrews 9:8)

Paul explains that access to the Holy of Holies was cut off during the time prior to Christ. The next two verses provide the keys to understanding which laws God imposed with a time-limit.

Which [was] a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; (Hebrews 9:9)

Notice the following things about this verse:

- 1) The Tabernacle (and later Temple) was a figure that represented something else. It represented access to God. The Holy of Holies represented the place where God dwells.
- 2) Two categories of things were offered at the Tabernacle: gifts that were voluntary, and sacrifices that were commanded.
- 3) This is a reference to THE DUTIES OF THE PRIESTHOOD. Their duties revolved around these "both gifts and sacrifices".
- 4) It is acknowledged that these things did not in actual fact achieve what they symbolically represented. They never did remove guilt from a guilty conscience.
- 5) This means that these "gifts and sacrifices" fell short in their intent, and that is something God was aware of from even before He "added" these laws to Israel through the hands of Moses. Therefore God

had added these laws only with a very specific time-limit.

Paul continues to explain in the next verse:

[Which stood] only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed [on them] until the time of reformation. (Hebrews 9:10)

Notice the following points about this verse:

- 1) The word "ONLY" imposes very strict limitations.
- 2) The priestly duties Paul is speaking about in connection with the Tabernacle here fall into exactly four categories, viz.
 - meat (food) offerings,
 - drink offerings,
 - various different ritualistic washings,
 - fleshly physical ordinances.
- 3) The word "until" imposes a strict time limit.
- 4) The things in these four categories, and these only, were "IMPOSED" on Israel. THIS WORD "IMPOSED" DOES NOT REFER TO THE LAW OF GOD! More about this later.
- 5) These four categories were "imposed" until the time of Jesus Christ, when they would be "reformed".

The word translated "imposed" in this verse is "epikeimai" and it is used seven times in the New Testament. It is used in Luke 5:1, where the people "PRESSED UPON" Jesus Christ. It is used in Luke 23:23, where the people were clamouring for the death of Jesus Christ when they were "INSTANT" with their loud voices. Paul used this word in 1 Corinthians 9:16 to refer to himself, when he said that necessity was "LAID UPON HIM" to preach the gospel.

This word "imposed" makes clear that Paul is talking about something that was added because of transgressions, something that was "pressed upon" Israel because of disobedience. But it was only pressed upon Israel with a time limit in mind.

The word translated "reformation" is the Greek word "diorthosis". It is used only here in the whole New Testament. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon defines this word as:

"a making straight, restoring to its natural and normal condition something which in some way protrudes or has gotten out of line."

In a secular way this word was used by Hippocrates to refer to broken or misshapen limbs which were restored to their natural condition.

When we understand this word "diorthosis" correctly, it also makes clear that some things had been added, thereby getting the original intent "out of line". By eliminating these four categories of things,

referred to in this verse, at the time of Christ, God was restoring the condition He had previously established.

THIS VERSE SPELLS OUT WHICH LAWS ARE DONE AWAY NOW IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES!

So now we are ready to look at all of the laws we find in the whole Old Testament.

THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF HEBREWS 9:10

Our original question was about a logical way to approach the use of the entire law. Let's do that now.

The laws of God are the rules of conduct that a loving God has revealed to mankind, which will lead to every good and right result. They will enable us to live happy abundant lives. They define and protect our liberties. All of them were given for our good. They are an expression of God's way of life, which Mr. Armstrong liked to call 'the GIVE way of life'.

Those laws will remain in force as long as there are physical mortal human beings on this Earth. They are the holy righteous law of liberty, which is holy, just and good.

When the people of Israel repeatedly disobeyed God, God ADDED more laws to this set of basic laws. These added laws involved the setting up of a human Levitical priesthood and the application of ritualistic, sacrificial and ceremonial laws. These laws, in a way of speaking, bent God's original intentions out of shape. Therefore God only imposed these additional laws for a very limited time period ... until the time of Christ's crucifixion. After Christ's first coming these added laws were again removed and thereby God's original intentions were, in a manner of speaking, again straightened out. [The original intentions which God had for mankind, that I am speaking about in this context, are THE REQUIREMENTS OF HOW WE ARE TO LIVE BEFORE GOD.]

Those added laws can be summarized as follows:

All of the laws that involved the Levitical priesthood carrying out any specific duties are done away:

- all ritualistic washings
- all pronouncements about people being "unclean"
- all sacrificial offerings
- all meat offerings (and flour offerings)
- all drink offerings
- all fleshly ordinances (including circumcision)
- all priestly Temple duties.

To further show us that these laws were no longer binding after Christ had brought His sacrifice "ONCE" (see Hebrews 9:26), God allowed two of the factors needed for these laws to be enforced to be removed. These two factors, essential for these added laws are:

- the existence of the Temple (or Tabernacle);
- the existence of a Levitical priesthood.

Without these two factors these added laws are ipso facto removed from being able to be acted on.

It is these laws that pointed to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. Therefore these are the laws that were no longer needed to point forward to the sacrifice that Jesus Christ would bring. The reality had come.

The only other laws in the Old Testament that are no longer binding on us today are the ones that were intended as civil laws for the nation of Israel and which required a civil government to enforce their observance. The Church of God today (unlike the congregation of Israel in O.T. times) transcends national boundaries and ethnic divisions. God has called a people unto Himself from all nations (explained in detail in Romans chpt 11). This means that laws, given with the intention that one whole nation would uniformly apply these laws, cannot possibly be enacted by the extremely small minorities that God's people make up in the nations of this world today.

It is not that the principles embodied in these laws are done away ... in many cases they are not done away at all. But compliance with these principles cannot be enforced. The responsibility of abiding by the principles of these laws today rests with the individual members of God's Church. I use the word "principles" rather than "laws" in this context, because many of these "laws" had specific applications to societies as they lived in O.T. times. Circumstances are different today, but the principles (which always involved being concerned for the welfare of other people) can still be applied today in our changed circumstances. In Matthew chapters 5-6 Jesus Christ made very clear that God expects us to obey the letter of His law; but God also, in addition, expects us to correctly extract the underlying principles that are involved, and to apply those as well.

THE ANSWER TO OUR ORIGINAL QUESTION

Right, so what about Leviticus chapter 11? Are those dietary laws still binding?

Certainly!

Determining which animals were fit for human consumption and which were not was not something that depended on the Levitical priesthood. At creation God had specifically designed certain animals as part of the human food-chain, Abel farmed with and brought clean animals as sacrifices to God, and in the days of Noah we already have references to clean and unclean animals.

What about Leviticus chapters 12-15? Are those laws still binding?

No, they are not ... although THE PRINCIPLES FOUND IN THESE LAWS should be adhered to by God's people.

Chapter 12 deals with circumcision (a fleshly ordinance) and ritualistic cleansing after childbirth, which was concluded with a sacrifice at the Tabernacle or Temple. Chapters 13-14 deal with identifying contagious diseases, something that the priesthood did. Chapter 15 deals with venereal diseases, something that also involved ritualistic cleansings.

There is no priesthood today and therefore these laws simply CANNOT be applied as they stand. But the principles, contained in these laws, certainly still hold good! God's people should apply sound principles of health and hygiene after childbirth, to protect both, the mother and the baby. God's people should most certainly practice principles of quarantine where contagious diseases are involved. The same

applies in the case of venereal diseases.

It should not be difficult for anyone, whose mind is being guided by God's Holy Spirit, to discern which laws in the O.T. are no longer binding on us today. To help us understand this, the Apostle Paul summarized all the laws that are involved in this for us in Hebrews 9:10.

As far as the verses which people present from Paul's writings are concerned: none of these verses do away with God's law. Not a single one. Each one of those verses can be explained in its correct context. That can be quite time-consuming and it is not my purpose in this particular article. However, we should never allow someone to intimidate us with a verse from Paul, taken out of context and presented via the corrupt NIV translation, to somehow do away with THE CLEAR WORDS OF JESUS CHRIST! The words of Jesus Christ about the law of God are clear and they require no interpretation. The words of Christ MUST form the foundation from which we examine every question regarding the law of God.

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