

God's Law For Today

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[0 : 00] I'm reading in 1st Timothy and chapter 1 and we'll read at verse 8. First letter of Paul to Timothy, chapter 1 and at verse 8, reading verses 8 to 11.

Now we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, understanding this that the law is not laid down for the just, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

I'm going to begin some studies on the law of God, looking at it under the title of God's law for today. And before we come to look at that as it's set out specially for us in the Ten Commandments, which is the summary, really, of God's law for us in the Ten Commandments.

We need to look at some questions as to why we're doing that, why is it necessary, what is the place of the law in our own experience as Christians, what is its application to the wider world in which we live, and there are two aspects to why we are looking at the law of God for today.

Firstly, because of uncertainty among Christians as to its application, and secondly, as to because of the ungodliness that is evident in our society.

[2 : 05] So the uncertainty among Christians, that's an uncertainty particularly about the extent to which the law of God applies in society.

In other words, is it something applicable beyond the church, beyond God's people, or does it have a wider application? Uncertainty indeed as to the purpose of the law.

What purpose, what benefit does the law have to anyone converted, to any people who have come to know deliverance from the curse of the law through faith in Christ?

Does that mean that the law has disappeared from the Christians' use of it, or does it have an application at all to the Christians' life?

And uncertainty really too as to what possible benefits can there be now to God's law, to these Ten Commandments in relation to our lives, when we know that they were given to Israel on Mount Sinai all of these centuries and millennia ago, how can they possibly be relevant to our age and to the circumstances we find ourselves in today?

[3 : 18] And tonight, briefly, I'm going to just touch on these two matters of two aspects, really why we're looking at this in the current climate we're in.

First of all, the uncertainty among Christians as to the application to which the law extends, the purpose of it and the benefits of it, there's that uncertainty. And that uncertainty is really something that revolves around two issues, I think.

We can narrow it down basically to two issues. First of all, the idea that Christ actually abolished the law in terms of its relevance in the New Testament age, that he came and abolished the law is what some people think, and that therefore because he abolished the law as an Old Testament thing, has no relevance anymore in the New Testament age, and especially to the lives of Christians who live by faith in Christ and not look to the works of the law for their justification.

That's the first thing that really has an uncertainty about it, whether or not Christ abolished the law. The second thing is that the argument goes that the Ten Commandments, the law of God in its summary form, that it applied only to Israel, and therefore if it applies to the New Testament at all, then it has to be confined to the church of God, to those who are indeed God's people or profess to be God's people, to the Christian church.

And the outwith of that, of course, people have chosen not to join the church or have anything to do with the church. How can the law of God have any possible relevance to people who don't belong to

the church and who've never belonged to the church?

[5 : 02] And relevance perhaps even to other systems of belief other than the Christian faith. What relevance does this particular law have to Muslims, to Buddhists, to people without any religion at all?

These are the kind of questions that keep coming up and that we need to come to the Bible to try and provide answers for. So there's that uncertainty among Christians as to the extent to which the law applies, if at all, and the purpose of it and the benefits that can be received from it.

Let's take that first argument, first of all, that Christ, in fact, has abolished the law. Well, if that's the case, it's strange that you would find Paul writing to Timothy where he's obviously dealing with the law of God and the benefits that we have and the purpose for it.

And now we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient. He's talking there about the application of the law of God in a wider sense than simply applying it to the Christian church.

And how do you answer the idea or the supposition that Christ has actually abolished the law, that he came into the world, that he fulfilled the law himself, therefore he took it away as far as we're concerned and as far as the world is concerned too?

[6 : 25] Well, first of all, you answer it by saying that the law of God, especially in the Ten Commandments, we'll come to the different categories of the law somewhat later on in our studies, that there is a ceremonial law or a body of law as a ceremonial law that was given to Israel which is no longer relevant because Christ fulfilled that as he did the sacrificial laws.

As they're fulfilled in Christ, they're no longer relevant. But in terms of the Ten Commandments, that in the Old Testament setting of it is a unique set of laws or a unique unit, if you like.

And it's significant in four ways or in four points. You can see the significance and the unique significance of the Ten Commandments as a body of laws that God gave to Israel and that we're going to argue belongs to the present day for us to apply and to actually apply beyond ourselves. There are four points that show its unique significance. First of all, how these laws were delivered. They were delivered by the direct speech of God.

They were delivered on Mount Sinai when God, as we read there in Exodus chapter 20, actually spoke out these laws to Moses and then on to the people of Israel.

[7 : 56] So the deliverance of them was a unique deliverance because it was a direct speech of God accompanied by what scholars or theologians call a theophany, a revelation of God of himself.

That's why you find the description of Mount Sinai described as it is, as on fire and shaking because God had descended on that mount. And the presence of God on that mount meant that that was such a holy place on earth because of the descent of God, because of the way he had revealed himself there and had spoken out these laws.

It was something of tremendous significance and solemnity. That's the first thing. They are unique because they were delivered by the direct speech of God uniquely.

Secondly, they are unique because of the number of them. The number 10 is the number of completeness. Very often in the Old Testament, you'll find that that's the number of completeness. So they are a complete unit. They are designed to be regarded as a complete unit. In other words, you're not in a position really to say, yes, but nowadays we can extract this one or that one or this other one as well.

[9 : 13] We can take these out and leave the rest because these three or four that we're selecting to actually be edited or taken out of the whole corpus, they're no longer relevant. So we're left with what is adequate for the present generation, but these no longer belong.

Well, that's something you cannot do because God gave them as a complete package or unit, as a unit of 10. And in fact, as we'll see in our studies, there's such an overlap anyway between these laws, these commandments, that if you take one out, you're really destroying the unity of the whole unit or package.

So they belong together. They belong as a whole. You cannot just take one out or two out or whatever and think you've got everything left as adequate.

So they were delivered by direct speech. They are intended to be a complete unit. Thirdly, they are written by the finger of God.

He spoke them out. But when Moses went up into the mountain and came back down with two tablets of stone, two, what we call them tablets, we don't know exactly how big they were, but he

was able to carry them made of stone.

[10:32] And they were written, we're told in Scripture, by the finger of God. Now you take that literally. It wasn't that God said to Moses, write this down. He did say that in some other instances.

And he said that to other people that you read of in the Bible to write certain things down that he was directing them to write down. But in the case of the Ten Commandments, they were written by the finger of God.

God inscribed into these tablets of stone these Ten Commandments, every single detail of these Ten Commandments, just like you would find nowadays with modern technology.

You would take a slab of metal or a slab of stone and using computer technology and all the wonderful instruments you find carving into a slab of stone very accurately.

That is what God did. They were inscribed by the finger of God. He wrote them. He wrote them himself. In other words, that itself shows you not only the source of them, because the source of them would have been the same had God directed Moses to write them, but God went to the length of writing them himself just to really make it clear that these were designed to last.

[11:47] They were in tablets of stone. He wrote them with his finger. They are intended to be permanent, to last, to be a body of laws for human society. And thirdly, you can answer the fact that the idea that Christ abolished the law, not only in how they were delivered and how many there are and how they were written, but also how they came to be stored.

Because Israel, again, by God's own direction, stored them in the Ark of the Covenant once the Ark was built and put into the Holy of Holies where it was kept, then it was there that the law was placed in the Ark of the Covenant and above which, of course, were the cherubim and the cloud signifying God's presence.

And that, of course, was the place where atonement, the blood of atonement, was sprinkled once a year on the Day of Atonement as an atonement for sin. So the law has a direct relevance to God's presence, to God's forgiveness, to God's own provision to atone for sin.

And therefore, the storage of them is itself significant because God was saying, this is something that you must carry permanently with you. They are designed in relation to my provision.

And we'll see here in Timothy that it actually connected there in the last verse we read in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God. That's what the law, as it contains, the law as it is for those who are transgressors and as it applies to transgressions.

[13:32] So all of that is in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted, says Paul. In other words, you mustn't think that. The law was for that generation of Old Testament people and now the gospel that it's come is for the New Testament generation from the moment that Christ came onwards.

What he's saying here is that there is a correspondence and a close connection between the law and the gospel. And that law that God gave to Israel was itself intended to portray God and the character of God and it connects with how that has come to be revealed in Jesus Christ.

But he didn't abrogate, he didn't dismiss, he didn't do away with the law, he didn't abolish them. They were designed to be a unit that remained in place for God's people.

So that's the first thing, that Christ abolished the law, you answered in that way. And then the second answer is that the law has three particular uses. And these three uses of the law actually continue to this very day because it's the very nature of the law and the way in which God gave it that shows you these three uses.

It's first of all a civil and political law. Or as for a civil and political use because these laws, these ten commands are applicable not just to individuals and not just to individuals who themselves profess to be God's people, the law of God, the commandments that God gave, are applicable in a civil and political setting.

[15:10] They are for society. They are actually for the maintaining of human society. They are for the maintaining of order in society. They are the basis of justice in society.

They are the basis of law keeping and the basis of penalties imposed for law breaking. If you don't actually have that continuing into our present day, then where are you going to get your laws? What laws are you going to use to apply to human life, to human behavior, to human relationships? Well, it's obvious, isn't it? You have to do away with the law of God and you're left with human laws. You're left with your own ideals. You're left with what human beings think is appropriate for human life. And you can see presently what a disaster that is because you end up with all kinds of

excesses and confusion.

It's for civil and political setting. It's for people. It's for nations. It's for governments, not just for individuals. And they are very applicable to that, as we'll see as we come eventually to each of the Ten Commandments themselves.

[16:15] But secondly, the second use of the law is its revelatory. It's a law that carries revelation, that reveals things to us. And the Bible, we'll come to more specific texts later, we're just dealing with very generally tonight, but the law is revelatory.

What I mean by that is that the law actually convicts us of sin. It reveals God's view of sin. It reveals God's opinion of sin.

It reveals what God thinks of behavior that does not comply with his law, with his standard. word. So the law is revelatory in that sense, but it doesn't just bring us conviction of sin, it gives us direction to where God has dealt with the problem of our sin.

As it brings our sin to light and convicts us of our sin, the law just doesn't leave us there openly wondering what we can now do. Galatians chapter 3 verse 24, and some theologians used this word pedagogic, coming from the Greek word pedagogos, who was a, that's in Greek culture, way back, that was the person who took children to school.

And the person who took children to school was usually a slave employed by the person whose children they were to bring them to school, and very often he sat behind them. Sometimes he would have a little rod in his hands of the child misbehaved, he would just give him a little touch or whatever, but he was there as a pedagogue, he was there to bring them to the school where they were educated.

[17:56] And the law is pedagogic or revelatory in the sense it doesn't just bring us conviction of sin, it actually prepares for the coming of Christ, and once Christ has come, when you're convinced of your sin by the law, what does God do?

Where does the law drive you? Where does it bring you? It brings you to Christ, it brings you to his righteousness. That brings you through the teaching of God's word to realize that the righteousness which the law demands in order for you and I to be acceptable with God, we cannot give because we're disqualified seeing we're sinners and we're sinful.

But as Romans 8 puts it, what the law could not do, God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.

Why? So that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us. And who are we who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit?

In other words, the law brings your sin to light and brings about the guilt of sin in your conscience, in your soul, but it doesn't leave you there, it directs you to God's answer to that, it directs you to the blood of Christ, to God's solution to our human sin.

[19:17] It's for a civil political use, it's wider than individual. Secondly, it's revelatory because it convicts of sin and drives us or brings us to Christ.

And thirdly, it's regulatory as well because, as we'll see, it is in fact a law which while we're not to use it as individuals in our relationship with God in order to win his favor.

We're not to use the law as a basis for righteousness, but once saved, you still see in that law a pattern of God's mind and of God's holiness.

And it's something that is used as a rule for shaping your life as you come to be accepted with God through faith in Christ without the works of the law which he has fulfilled.

Nevertheless, as you come to the law, the law that's really summarized if you like is you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul and your neighbor as yourself.

[20:20] It hasn't gone away. It's there. That's the ideal. And through faith in Christ that is what we're aiming at but you see the shape of that in the law's own requirements.

So, that's the first thing. As Christ abolished the law, the uncertainty of that can be answered in the way we've briefly shown. The second is that the uncertainty around whether the Ten Commandments were only for Israel or only for the church.

Well, the answer to that is in part at least to remember that the law, although it was given on Sinai, the Ten Commandments, that wasn't the beginning of God's law.

Adam had a law of God in his heart and actually specified by God even as a perfect human being in the Garden of Eden.

God said to him, you shall not eat of that one tree of the knowledge of good and evil for in the day that you do so you shall surely die. There is law in the middle of perfection in the Garden of Eden and yet God is specifying or commanding Adam in a specific way a perfect man who has given a law by God in order that he will know more of the benefits of obedience to God.

[21 : 41] And from there on you find evidence that God had made known what would be specified in the Ten Commandments at different points before they were given on Sinai.

Let me just think of just speak of one, picking up one text here which really summarizes this point for us very well. Genesis 25 and verse 5 this is God actually speaking to Esau, sorry not to Esau to Isaac where he is saying in regards to Isaac that Abraham was actually someone who lived and came to know of God and the laws of God because he knew the statutes of God and also came to comply with those statutes of God where God had specified for them and that was before Sinai.

I've got the wrong reference there so I'm not sure. Genesis 25 5 is where I've got marked down but I don't think that's actually the right reference. anyway we can actually leave that but there is a reference there I'm sorry about that error with the text but I'll check it up and correct it later.

But there is a text which specifies that God had actually given to Abraham specification of his statutes and his precepts and that Abraham had kept those and that in doing so you can see the law existed before the Mount Sinai was ever reached by the people of Israel.

So Adam was not left you see to work out the norms of behavior for himself. God didn't say to him now I've made you you're perfect you don't need a law you just have to work out yourself what is and isn't acceptable to me and because you're a perfect human being as I've created you you've got all the ability that you need to do that.

[23 : 37] You can work out for yourself which of these trees of the garden I would not like you to eat of. He didn't do that. He specified it for him. He gave him a law in that perfection of Eden.

And so it's the same for Israel as well. As the law was given to Israel we have to remember that all the way through the Old Testament one of the things that God rightly accused Israel of was not actually living up to the ideal that God had set for them.

That was to be a witness to the nations. A witness to the nations conveying their God and what their God was like. Instead they had failed to do that and sometimes failed rather badly.

But they were meant to convey the law of God or at least the character of God through their obedience to his laws to the nations around them. And they had failed to do that.

And that's essentially what the New Testament church does too. That's what we're doing in the gospel. We're conveying the character of God but not leaving the law entirely out of it by any means.

[24 : 47] So uncertainty among Christians will need to hurry to the second point which was ungodliness in our society. Why are we looking at this law of God? Why are we dealing with it at this particular time?

Of course it's important at all times. Well two things. The ungodliness in our society first of all comes from what we can call a relativist view of truth.

In other words people have an idea of truth that there is no absolute standard or absolute norm for truth. You just treat things relatively and truth is just what you make it really at the end of the day. Whatever works for you that's the truth for you. Whatever works for the church for the Christians that's truth for them. Whatever works for a Buddhist that's the truth for them. Whatever works for a secularist that's the truth for them.

It's all relative. You can't actually build that relativism into the Bible or take it from the Bible. It's not relative. It's absolute. God's law is the standard.

[25 : 53] It is an absolute law and truth is defined as absolute in that way. In other words if you do away with the Bible and do away with the God's own specifications you're really back to what Genesis 11 says of the Tower of Babel incident.

You remember that incident where people said let's build a tower the top of which will reach to heaven and let us make for ourselves a name in case we be scattered all over the earth.

That was the ambition, the drive, the pride of sinful human beings as they got together and sought to make a permanent name for themselves without God.

Isn't that what your society and the society we live in isn't that what it's doing? Let's ensure our permanence. Let's ensure that we continue with human ideals.

Let's build a tower that will reach to heaven. And God came down and scattered them abroad and confused their languages. That's what Babel means. It means confusion.

[27 : 02] Don't apply that to the Babel in point by the way. It's a different spelling altogether and a different meaning. But that's what Babel in the Old Testament actually means. It's confusion.

And that's where the confusion came from. It came from rebellion and arrogance against God and the judgment of God on that arrogance and that drive to just live in a way that builds one layer of human achievement on the next without God leads to confusion.

And that's the confusion you find in society as to what's right and wrong, what is or isn't acceptable individually, collectively, relationships, it's all there. So a relativist view of truth ultimately leads to that confusion.

And then ungodliness in society, you can see the degenerate behavior that's evident in our world today. It's all around you. It's not surprising if you have for generations kept taking God out of human life.

If you take God out of our schools and our education, it's not neutrality you've got left, is it? It's human wisdom, it's human confusion.

[28 : 25] you end up with all kinds of distortions. That's where your current situation of gender dysphoria and gender confusion and all that's now sadly been drummed into children's minds in different places in our country in regard to their identity and to their gender.

Where does it come from? It comes from the confusion that you get when you put God's law aside, when you say we have our own human wisdom, thank you very much, we don't need these sort of things anymore.

That's why it's important that we actually understand this for ourselves as Christians, that we try and convey as best we can the need of society, the people of our day, for this law, for these standards that God has actually given us.

The Ten Commandments, interestingly, we'll see as well as we go through them, they require, it's an interesting point, that they require the opposite of what's said. If it's a negative, then it requires the positive on our part.

In other words, when you find the commandment saying you shall not kill, you shall not murder, that carries with it the need to preserve life.

[29 : 39] It doesn't just mean you don't take life, it means you go to every length possible, lawfully, to preserve life. And you can see how that impinges on matters such as euthanasia or abortion.

That comes under the provisions of that commandment. You shall not commit murder, you shall not kill. The preserving of life, and preserving methods and medicine and so on to try and preserve human life, that all comes under the positive side of that commandment.

And you could really go through the Ten Commandments over time and see how much we've really departed from them in the society we have today.

We profane God's name. We trade the Lord's Day for financial and sporting pursuits. We dishonor parents and authority. Murder is not rare, sadly, in our streets.

We mentioned abortion, the demand for euthanasia. We promote non-marital sex. Adultery would distort the whole idea of marriage. Stealing is not uncommon.

[30 : 47] It's sadly linked to problems like drug addiction. It includes sophisticated tax dodges. Lying is not seen as something serious. Truth is not regarded as anything absolute.

We covet other people's property and wives and husbands and position. Covetousness, as is the heart of all of our sins.

We covet because we want something other than what God says is good for us. So the law is designed, you see, for human society. That's why I've chosen this passage.

We haven't expounded a passage, but it does set out in 1 Timothy 8 to 11 the way in which the law is relevant and must be useful and applied in our day as well.

So good to leave it at that for this evening and we'll turn to just conclude with singing from Psalm 119. Psalm 119 on page 165.

[31 : 49] Psalm 119, these verses on page 165.

Psalm 119, these verses on the line of the Lord. You statutes, Lord, are wonderful, so I obey them from my heart.

Your words of the and hope you light to simple minds in par.

With open mouth I pant and yearn to know the laws that you proclaim.

Show me the mercy you extend to those who love and praise your name.

[33 : 28] I rest my first steps in your word. Let sin not hold me in its way.

From man's oppression set me free. At your commands I may obey.

Upon your sermons shine your face.

Teach me the statutes you have made. My eyes shed streams of bitter tears.

Because your law is not obeyed. than two factors like hundreds of facts are you working with■■■■

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