

Covenant Theology (March 9, 2025)
The Mosaic Covenant in the New Testament

The New Testament and the Mosaic Covenant (Continuity)

- “For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.” (John 5:46)
- “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.” (Luke 16:31)
- “From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.” (Acts 28:23)
- “The line from Moses to Christ was a direct one.” —Stephen Myers, *God to Us*, 208

The New Testament and the Mosaic Covenant (Discontinuity)

- “For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.” (Heb. 3:3)
- “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.” (Heb. 4:14)
- “But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.” (Heb. 8:6)
- “...In its warnings not to rest in or return to the Mosaic covenant, the New Testament is not presenting the Mosaic covenant as negative in a qualitative or absolute sense; rather, the Scriptures are asserting that it is negative to revert to that Mosaic covenant. What the Scriptures are condemning is covenantal regression--seeking to move backward in the order of God's mounting revelation of the covenant of grace.” —Myers, 209

The New Testament and the Mosaic Law

- Ceremonial, civil, and moral laws
- “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill them.” (Matthew 5:17)
- “So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” (Romans 7:12)

The Uses of the Mosaic Law in the New Testament

1. Mirror (to expose our sin)
2. Bridle (to curb our sin)
3. Guide (to grow in holiness)

“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 gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.” (1 Tim. 1:8-11)

The Law Is Not an Instrument of Justification

- “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them’ [Deut. 27:26]. Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith’ [Hab. 2:4]. But the law is not of faith, rather ‘The one who does them shall live by them’ [Lev. 18:5]. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’ [Deut. 21:23]—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.” (Galatians 3:10-14)
- “For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them.” (Rom. 10:5, quoting Lev. 18:5)
- “The blessings that the law brings, it brings to those who do, who perform. The blessings that faith brings, it brings to those who ‘receive’ and who ‘rest.’ So, on the one hand God always had justified His people by faith’s trusting rest, and on the other hand the law operated in relation to performance.” —Myers, 220–221
- “Imagine a parallel situation with the human body. Each man, woman, and child needs both refreshment and fitness. Refreshment comes through rest. Fitness comes through exertion. All of these activities are good and beneficial for the body. Refreshment, rest, fitness exertion—all of these are beneficial. But they are also different. And given the close connections between them, it would be foolish to pursue further exertion when you need refreshment. Exertion is good, but refreshment does not come through exertion. Refreshment comes through rest, and exertion is clearly not connected to rest. Exertion is wonderful, but it is useless for something that it never was intended to do in the first place.” —Myers, 222

Paul’s Use of Leviticus 18:5

1. The **Rhetorical** view: Paul was only speaking ironically from the standpoint of his Judaizing opponents, but Moses never actually affirmed life/righteousness by the law.
2. The **Typological** view: Moses affirmed an earthly reward for Israel’s national obedience, which foreshadowed a heavenly reward for perfect obedience (that is, Christ).
3. The **Hypothetical** view: Moses affirmed only the abstract principle of justification for perfect obedience, which was neither possible nor the essential intent of the law given to Israel.
4. The **Literal** view: Moses affirmed a principle of blessing for obedience to the law, which is still operative in the new covenant. But such blessing corresponds only to sanctification; justification has always and only been by faith.

Indwelt by the Holy Spirit

- “... So that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.” (Galatians 3:14)
- “... In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Rom. 8:4)

The Role of the Law in the Christian Life

- Ignore the law of God?
- Focus on the parts that you keep?
- Focus on the parts that you don’t keep?