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MINISTRIES

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Did Jesus Do Away With the Old Testament Law?

Should Christians keep the Old Testament law? Or did Jesus do away with the law when he completed his work on the cross?

When we talk about the Old Testament law, we’re referring to what Scripture often calls the Law of God or Law of Moses. It’s called the Law of Moses because Moses was the prophet who wrote it down. This law is also called the Torah because Torah is the Hebrew word for law. God’s law can be found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It commands things like resting on the seventh day of the week (Exodus 20:9), not eating pork and shellfish (Leviticus 11:7, 10), and loving your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18).

In the Old Testament, God’s people were expected to follow his Torah, the Law of Moses. But many believe that this expectation changed in the New Testament. They claim that when Jesus died on the cross, the law was done away with. But is that true? Can we ignore the Torah now that we are following Christ? Jesus gives a direct answer to this question in Matthew 5:17-20.

Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets” (Matthew 5:17). The word “abolish” (*kataluo*) means “to cause to be no longer in force” (BDAG, “καταλύω”). So, Jesus says explicitly that he did *not* come to cause the law or Prophets to be no longer in force.

Instead, he said, “I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Now, some take this to mean that Jesus rendered the law obsolete by fulfilling it. In the words of Christian author Andy Stanley:

“Jesus did not abolish the law when he fulfilled it. But in fulfilling it, he made it...obsolete”

—Andy Stanley, *Irresistible: Reclaiming the New that Jesus Unleashed for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 110

So, Jesus didn’t abolish the law, but he did make it obsolete? This interpretation doesn’t make much sense. There’s no difference between abolishing something and making it obsolete. The end result is exactly the same. The word “fulfill” can’t mean the same thing as “abolish.”

A better understanding of the word “fulfill” in Matthew 5:17 is “bring to full expression = show it forth in its true meaning” (BDAG, “πληρώω”). In other words, Jesus fulfills the law by teaching and demonstrating how to properly keep it. Not only does this provide an actual contrast to the word “abolish,” but it also fits much better with the rest of Matthew chapter 5. Throughout this chapter, Jesus expounds upon the law, bringing out its true application and meaning.

In the very next verse, Jesus says that not an iota or dot would pass away from the law until heaven and earth pass away and all is accomplished (Matthew 5:18). That is to say, nothing from the law will pass away until the end of the age and the arrival of the new heavens and new earth, when the present created universe passes away (2 Peter 3:7, 13; Revelation 21:1). So not only does Jesus say he did not come to abolish the law, but also he says that it will remain relevant as long as heaven and earth exist. It’s not going to go away any time soon.

In verse 19, Jesus admonished his followers to do and teach even the least of the commandments of the law (Matthew 5:19). Jesus warns that whoever “relaxes” even the least of the commandments will be least in the kingdom. What does it mean to “relax” a commandment? “Relaxes” is the Greek word *luo*, which is related to *kataluo*, the word translated “abolish” in verse 17 (BDAG, “λύω”). Essentially, Jesus says that since he did not come to abolish the law, neither should his followers.

Finally, in verse 20, Jesus calls his followers to a way of righteousness that exceeds the scribes and Pharisees. In other words, we need to keep the law better than they did. How do Jesus’s followers keep the law better than the scribes and Pharisees? By keeping it the way that Jesus taught us to keep it. That’s what the sermon on the mount is all about. Jesus taught the correct way to keep the law and explained why his way was better than the ways of the scribes and Pharisees.

So, should Christians keep the Old Testament law? It looks like Jesus gives us a clear answer in Matthew 5. Christian scholar, Dr. Carmen Imes, gives a great summary of Jesus’s answer:

Jesus does not do away with the Old Testament law. He calls people back to it. And he holds them to it.

—Carmen Imes, *Bearing God’s Name: Why Sinai Still Matters* (Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2019), 143.

Now, obviously there is more to the Bible than just Matthew chapter 5. So, what do we do about other Bible verses that seem to say that Christians should *not* keep the law of Moses?

Well, when we are confronted with an apparent contradiction in Scripture, a good hermeneutical principle is to interpret difficult passages in light of clear passages. Matthew 5:17-20 is an example of a clear passage. As New Testament scholar, Dr. J. Andrew Overman writes:

Although this passage is the subject of lively controversy, it is unambiguous and does indeed command obedience to the whole Torah.

—J. A. Overman, *Church and Community in Crises: The Gospel According to Matthew* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 78

In contrast to this simple, straightforward statement by Jesus, the statements that Paul makes are more complex. For instance, in Romans 6:14, Paul says that we are “[not under the law, but under grace](#),” but

then in Romans 7:22, he says that he “[delights in the law of God.](#)” In Galatians 5:18, Paul says that those who are led by the Spirit are “[not under the law,](#)” but just a few verses later, he justifies the fruit of the Spirit by saying they are not against the law (Galatians 5:23). Paul’s arguments are nuanced, and sometimes difficult to follow. We should interpret them in light of Matthew 5:17-20 instead of the other way around. Rest assured, there *is* a way to reconcile these difficult passages in Galatians and Romans with Jesus’s teaching in Matthew 5:17-20. Christian scholar Dr. Daniel Block provides some good insights:

In Romans and Galatians [Paul’s] argumentation addresses those who would pervert the “law” (a narrow legalistic interpretation of Hebrew *Torah*) into a means of salvation, rather than treating it as a response to salvation as Moses perceived it. While on the surface Paul’s responses to this heresy often appear to contradict Moses, these statements should be interpreted in context and as rhetorical responses to his opponents. In his own disposition toward the “law” he was in perfect step with Moses: obedience to the law was not a means for gaining salvation but a willing and grateful response to salvation already received.

—Daniel Block, *The Gospel According to Moses: Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), p. 3

As we can see, Paul considered the law itself to be a good thing (Romans 7:12). When we read Paul’s statements in context, we discover that Paul did not oppose the law; he opposed the misuse of the law. Paul wanted to emphasize that we are saved by grace through faith. But Paul also says, “[Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law](#)” (Romans 3:31).

We would invite you to look at the Scriptures with fresh eyes and consider this issue in light of Jesus’s clear statement on the matter. At 119 Ministries, we have many in-depth teachings on this topic that you might find helpful.

So, did Jesus do away with the law? Not at all. God’s law, the Torah, is still relevant today. And we as Christians should be keeping it.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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Examining the question, did Jesus do away with the Old Testament law?

2) A short summary of the teaching for the Vimeo description.
A short look at the idea that Jesus did away with the Old Testament law.

3) Include keywords, longer description, and some key scripture verses
Did Jesus do away with the Old Testament Law?, Matthew 5:17-20, heaven and earth pass away,
abolish or fulfill, pleroo