**The Christian and Old Testament Law**

*by Joe R. Price*

We affirm that we live under the authority of Jesus Christ today, and that His authority is revealed in His gospel, the New Testament (Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 1:16). Many who believe Jesus is the Christ, appeal to and practice portions of the law given through Moses. By doing so they believe they are giving honor to God. This is a brief review of why such an approach of attempting to honor God does not harmonize with the word of Christ.

When given a choice between Moses, Elijah (the prophets) and Jesus, we are to “hear Him” in all things (Matthew 17:5; Acts 3:22-23; Hebrews 1:1-2). If we listen to Moses and the prophets instead of or before Jesus, then we are not honoring the Father and the Son.

The apostles of Christ, inspired by the Holy Spirit, were guided into “all truth.” So, when we hear and receive them, we hear and receive Christ (John 16:12-15; 13:20; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). If we listen to Moses and the prophets instead of or before Jesus, then we are not honoring the Spirit of God by whom the gospel of Christ was given.

Disciples of Christ are under a fundamental responsibility to do everything “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17). What we say and do must have His permission; it must be by His authority as revealed in the New Testament.

The question is occasionally asked if we believe we are still under Torah law. An analysis of the Bible on this topic leads us to conclude “we” (Christians) were never under Torah law. While the things written in the Old Testament are for our learning, they are not our authoritative source for what we practice as Christians (Romans 15:4; Ephesians 2:11-22).

The law God gave Israel through Moses was called the “book of the covenant” and the “book of the law” (Exodus 24:7; Deuteronomy 31:24-26). It included the Ten Commandments and was God’s covenant with the nation of Israel:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel. So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 34:27-28)

This is crucial to recognize and acknowledge: this covenant was a national law for a temporary period of time. It was never given as a universal law for all nations in perpetuity. Hence, on the mount of transfiguration, the Father said to “hear” His Son (Matthew 17:5).

When Moses spoke to the Israelites as they were about to enter the Promised Land, he acknowledged God had made a covenant with them:

And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: “Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive (Deuteronomy 5:1-3).

The Law of Moses (also called the “law of the Lord,” 2 Chronicles 30:15-16; 31:3-4), with its laws of circumcision, feast days, dietary regulations, animal sacrifices, etc. were bound upon the nation of Israel. The law helped to set apart Israel from the other nations as God’s special or chosen people (Exodus 19:5-6). This law also taught Israel about sin and its sinfulness (Romans 3:19-20; 7:7; Galatians 3:22).

Jesus fulfilled the purposes and promises of the old law (Matthew 5:17-18; Romans 10:4; Acts 3:20-26). The apostle Paul clearly said we are not under the old covenant. “Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:23-25). The “faith” of which he spoke is the gospel of Christ, and the “tutor” is “the law” of Moses (see Galatians 1:11, 23; 2:19; Jude 3). The Law of Moses was “nailed to the cross”, no longer to be bound on the Jews as a law from God. That law was not to be pressed upon Gentiles as necessary for their approval before God (Colossians 2:14-17). This was one of the major doctrinal battles in the early church, as seen in Acts 15 as well as Galatians 2. (The books of Romans, Galatians and Hebrews deal extensively with this subject, as well as portions of other NT epistles.) In fact, the apostle said Christians who tried to be justified before God by keeping the law of Moses were “estranged from Christ” and “fallen from grace” (Galatians 5:3-4).

Christians rely on the New Testament of Christ for our authority in all things. The tabernacle, gifts and sacrifices of the old covenant were “the copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:1-5). When compared to the tabernacle and its service (which was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai), Christ “has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises” (Hebrews 8:4-6). We ought not to go back to an inferior ministry that could never take away sins (Hebrews 10:1-4). Instead, we “hear” Jesus and find in Him the grace that saves us from our sins (Hebrews 2:9-10; 5:8-9; Titus 3:4-7).

Since we are not under the Old Testament law, we do not celebrate the feasts associated with it. The apostle Paul said, “Let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ” (Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 10:1). The gospel of Christ does not bind these shadows on Christians today, and neither do we.

Christians believe the Old Testament is inspired by God, giving us wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ (2 Timothy 2:15). It does not have binding authority over anyone today. We are answerable to Jesus (John 12:48). We must “hear Him” by listening to and obeying the things He instructs in His gospel (Matthew 7:24-27; 28:18-20; Acts 17:30-31; 2 John 9-11).