

# Did Jesus change the law ?

Millions of people believe that when Jesus Christ died, God's Law died with Him.

And if you're prepared to follow most theologians through a set of mental gymnastics and feats of legerdemain, you too can arrive at such a foolish conclusion. On the other hand, you could believe Jesus when He said He wasn't on earth to destroy the Law:

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled." (Matthew 5:17-18)

Now, there's just no way around that passage. People often leap on the words "till all is fulfilled" and claim that happened when Christ

died, but to arrive there they have to ignore the words "till heaven and earth pass away."

Even Paul, whom many people believe preached that the Law was gone, gives the lie to any idea that Christians don't have to observe God's Law:

"For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man." (Romans 7:22)

But like all of us, Paul was subject to weakness and passion:

"..So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." (Romans 7:25)

Did he mean that because he sinned, the Law was done away? No, if the Law was done away he wouldn't have been going through the turmoil of regret about sometimes breaking it. Paul knew the Law was to be observed by Christians, and in his mind he wanted to keep it. That is, he was walking in the Spirit, not the flesh. And as long as he was in that attitude, he was delivered from the penalty of breaking it. The Law wasn't done away for him, but the penalty of breaking it was. Just as Jesus said:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." (John 5:24)

But discussions like this can cloud the issue. Because no one really ever has a complaint about keeping laws relating to adultery, or stealing or honouring one's parents etc. The underlying (and often unrealised) motive of saying the law is done away is an attack on the Sabbath. Most people are quite happy with ninety percent of the Ten Commandments, it's the Sabbath they can't accept.

To be fair, however, we have to admit they did get half way to the truth in the matter of the Law being done away. But they didn't examine the New Covenant closely enough to discover that it re-included most of the Law which disappeared with the Old Covenant. Because the New Covenant not only consigned the Old Covenant to history, it instituted a body of Law which still included the Ten Commandments.

In the Book of Hebrews we see that the Old Covenant is obsolete:

"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbour, and none his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more. In that He says, A new covenant, He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." (Hebrews 8:7-13)

Notice that it says the Old Covenant is becoming obsolete, and ready to vanish away. The Old Covenant will not pass till the New Covenant is made with Israel, after they are returned from the coming Captivity, which we usually refer to as the Tribulation. But now, ahead of the time the New Covenant is made on a grand scale, it has been made with a small group of people who have been called to be Christians:

"...which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar - for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia,

and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children - but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all ...Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise...So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free." (Galatians 4:24-26,28,31)

So for us, the Old Covenant has already passed away. But what exactly was the Old Covenant? Of what did it consist? Well you might be surprised:

"Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you. Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry." (Hebrews 9:18-21)

The Old Covenant consisted of the Law, and the method of contact with God - that is, the Tabernacle and its Levitical ministry. But what law? This is where you might be surprised:

"And the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; you only heard a voice. So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone." (Deuteronomy 4:12-13)

Now there is no way around this passage, just as we saw there was no way around Jesus' statement that the Law would not pass till heaven and earth passed away. The Old Covenant included the Ten Commandments. On the one hand we have seen that for Christians the Old Covenant has gone, and with it the Ten Commandments,



but on the other hand we have seen that Christians are to observe the Ten Commandments.

Various groups solve this quandary in various ways. Those who want to do away with the Law ignore the clear instructions to keep it, while those who want to keep the Law ignore the passage in Deuteronomy. But as Jesus said, the Scripture cannot be broken, so this apparent conflict must be able to be easily resolved.

It is resolved by the New Covenant:

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more. (Hebrews 8:10,12)

There are two parts to the New Covenant - forgiveness of sin, and God's Law in human hearts.

The forgiveness of sin part is embraced by millions of people, but they discard the part about God's Law. Others embrace the part about God's Law but have little real understanding about God's grace. The truth embraces both parts of the Covenant whole heartedly.

The question now is, which laws does God write in human minds and hearts when He makes the New Covenant with them? We know it isn't just a restatement of the Old Covenant laws, because we have already seen in Hebrews that the New Covenant would not be according to the Old. So, which laws?

The answer to that is given in the place where the New Covenant is first described:

"...that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live...And you will return and obey the voice of the Lord and do all His commandments which I command you today." (Deuteronomy 30:3-6,8)

The Laws to be kept under the New Covenant are those which were commanded "today". That is, the Book of the Law which Moses delivered to the people at the time just before they crossed into the promised land. That was when the Law of the New Covenant was spelled out, even though the Covenant itself would not come into force until Christ sprinkled it with His blood.

But these Laws of the New Covenant are not the same as the Laws of the Old Covenant. The principal difference is the manner and method of contact with God. This is what is being referred to in Hebrews:

"Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to

another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. For He testifies: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God." (Hebrews 7:11-19)

What changed was that the old religion - the way of contacting God - passed away. Under the Old Covenant, God could not be approached directly, but only through the Levitical priesthood. Under the New Covenant, we approach God directly through Jesus Christ, our new High Priest.

This means we have a new religion. A religion of the Spirit. We no longer need a priesthood to intervene with God on our behalf, because the way into God's presence was opened by Christ. No longer do we have to do things, or have a priesthood do things on our behalf.

And this is the point over which many people stumble. They stumble over Christ. Because just like the Jews in the time of early Christianity, they can't accept that the new religion doesn't have "works" as a part of it. They feel insecure and fearful about letting go of laws which were not carried over into the New Covenant. Because they don't understand something crucial about the Old Covenant. And that is that it was never meant to last. It was always meant to be merely a forerunner of the true religion which the New Covenant would bring.



The Old Covenant religion, however, wasn't some arbitrary group of laws and practices which were going to someday be scorned. The Old Covenant religion was a carefully crafted physical model of the New Covenant religion. That is, it acted out in a physical way what would happen in the future when Christ came. But when Christ did come, the physical model was outmoded. It had fulfilled its function, which was to cast a shadow into the future until the reality - not the shadow - would appear.

But to interrupt ourselves, this had nothing to do with the Ten Commandments. Under the Old Covenant, the religion was added to the Ten Commandments, and it is the religion we are discussing. Under the New Covenant, a new religion is added to the Ten Commandments. That is, a new way of approaching God. The old religion was a physical model of the new spiritual religion.

For example, under the old religion - the "Levitical" religion - forgiveness of sin wasn't possible:

"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshippers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins." (Hebrews 10:1-4)

Notice that the method of forgiving sin wasn't effective - it was merely a shadow of the forgiveness which would come in the future when Christ died. But notice also that if that method *were* effective - that is, if the sins were actually forgiven - then there would be no longer any need to repeat

the sacrifices to forgive sin. As it says "then would they not have ceased to be offered?"

So when Christ did come - the reality that the shadow looked forward to - and sins were forgiven, He needed only to sacrifice Himself once:

"not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another-- He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." (Hebrews 9:25-26)

And after He had offered Himself the once and forgiven sins, there was no longer any need to act out the shadow in a yearly observance of the forgiveness of sin. Because as we saw, "then would they not have ceased to be offered?"

Which is why the Day of Atonement doesn't appear in the New Covenant Law. (That's what the discussion in Hebrews is about - the Day of Atonement.)

And it is this point and some others, over which many people stumble, because as we said earlier, they stumble over Christ. They are not prepared to accept that Christ fulfilled what the Day of Atonement looked forward to - the forgiveness of sins forever. And since they cannot accept that, they keep on observing the Day of Atonement. Despite the fact that the Scriptures show the Old Covenant has passed away for Christians, and the Day of Atonement with it.

Now since we have seen that there was a change in the law, what about Jesus' statement that not a jot or tittle would pass from the law till all

is fulfilled? Because with New Covenant Law, jots and titles certainly did pass from the Old Covenant Law.

The answer to this gives us enormous security, because the answer shows us that in His dealings with human beings, God doesn't place Himself above the Law. That is, God makes sure there is a legal basis for everything He does. Which gives us the absolute assurance that God is not whimsical or arbitrary, and we always know where we stand with Him.

These changes we have been discussing were made by Jesus, but where did He get the authority to do so? Because the Law itself said no one was to add to it or subtract from it, so if Christ did that, He sinned. And if He sinned, we have no salvation.

The Law said that the Temple (at Jerusalem) was the centre of God's religion, but Jesus said it wasn't:

"Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship. Jesus said to her, Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:20-24)

Jesus was explaining the New Covenant religion to this woman and saying the Old Covenant religion didn't apply any more. But where did He get the authority to do so? It isn't enough to say Jesus was the Son of God and therefore He could do what He liked, because that simply was not true. He was subject to the Law, and the penalty for breaking it, just the same as any other human being:



"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law..." (Galatians 4:4)

He was under the law and had to obey it, and saying that the Temple didn't matter any more was a violation of Deuteronomy 12:5:

"But you shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go."

The reason He could change the Law, was that the Law itself gave Him the authority to do so. This is the same as in our society, where Parliament might enact a law about something, say motor vehicles for example, and included in the act is a part that gives authority to the Commissioner for Transport to make or change regulations. But if the original act didn't give the Commissioner the power to make regulations and he went ahead and made some anyway, he would be acting illegally and the regulations he made wouldn't be binding.

And in the same way, God made certain that before He sent Jesus to earth, He had written in the Law the authority for Jesus to change that law. So when Jesus came, He had the authority of the Father and the Law, to change the Father's Law. Deuteronomy identified Jesus as the One, and the only one, who had the authority to alter the Law:

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you

shall hear, according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die. And the Lord said to me: What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My

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words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him." (Deuteronomy 18:15-19)

And in the Book of Acts, we see that the Prophet which Deuteronomy predicted was Jesus:

"and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said to the fathers, The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people." (Acts 3:20-23)

That last verse should make us all think. Because it sentences to

death anyone who will not listen to the changes Christ made in the law.

We have seen clearly that the Law did change when Christ died, and we have seen just what that change consisted of. We have also seen that the changes are not something which can safely be ignored. But God made human beings to be slow to change and

that's a good thing. We are all a little frightened of new things, especially something like this change in the Law, which seems to threaten the basis of our whole life. But as we say often, the truth

can never hurt you. It can make you very uncomfortable for a while, but you'll never be harmed by it.

God knows that change is hard. that's what Jesus was talking about when He said this:

"And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, The old is better." (Luke 5:39)

But the Old is not better. However, you'll never know that until you've tasted the New.#

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