

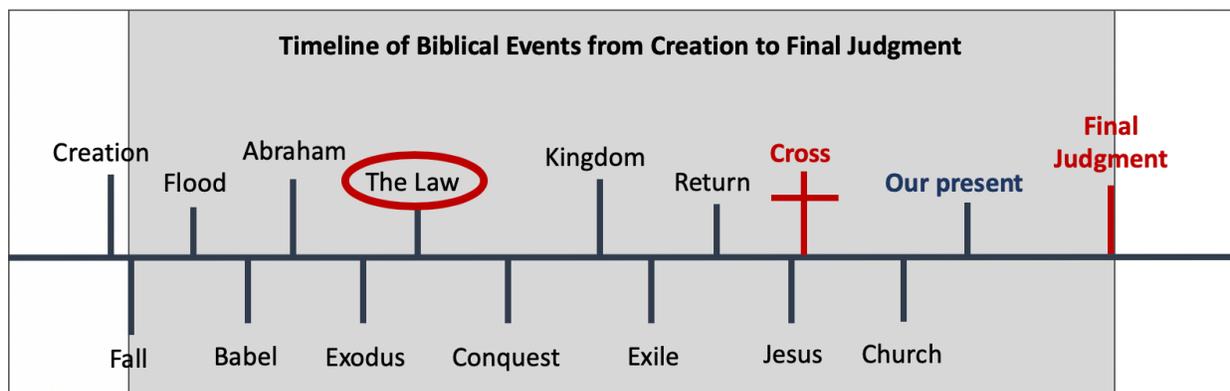
Lesson 14: God's Perfect Law

Previously...

At Mount Sinai, Yahweh made a covenant with Israel. He gave them His law. Unlike impersonal human law codes, God's law came from His heart as a Father and was given to Israel, His son. He wanted them to obey out of gratitude for all He had done for them.



God was fully committed to His relationship with Israel and He viewed it so seriously that He put in place witnesses (the Law, Israel's national anthem and "heaven and earth"), prosecuting attorneys (the prophets), as well as blessings and cursings (for keeping or breaking the contract).



Yahweh's Relationship with Israel

God's plan was for Israel to be a blessing to the whole world. They were to be unique, a kingdom of priests, teaching God's history and truth to the world.



But before they could do that, there was a lot they needed to learn. So Yahweh started a nation-building programme and gave them His Law, their national anthem, their calendar of holidays, feasts and festivals, and instructions for temple worship.

Pagan Kingdom of Man Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas	Kingdom of God Based on GRACE God would save man
 <p>Babel</p>  <p>Egypt</p>	Election
	 <p>God chose Abraham</p>
	 <p>God saved Israel</p>
<p>God built Israel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Law ▪ National anthem ▪ Temple worship ▪ Feasts & festivals 	



God's Laws

But what were God's laws like? The 613 laws are comprehensive and address many areas of daily life that would have been of concern to the Israelites.

Areas covered by Yahweh's Law

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship to God • Idolatry and related practices • Blasphemy • Torah (first 5 books of the Bible) • Temple and priests • Sacrifices • Vows • Ritual purity • Donations to the temple • Festivals • The Sabbatical year • Nazarites (people specially set apart for service to God) • The monarchy (laws related to the king) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community • War • Social interactions • Family • Justice/legal system (related to court of law) • Slaves • Torts (wrongful acts that cause injury) • Prohibitions based on historical events • Dietary laws • Agriculture • Loans, business and the treatment of slaves • Justice • Incest and other forbidden relationships
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Here is a sampling of what we find in God's laws.

A. God made man and He knows best how to care for man.

Many of the laws don't explain everything that was going through God's mind when He issued them. However, they show God's concern for the people's welfare. Even if they didn't fully understand, they would be well taken care of when they obeyed.

Example 1: God taught the people about quarantine.

Today, we understand a lot more about the spread and prevention of infectious diseases. Many hospitals and nations quarantine, or isolate, an infectious person to prevent the spread of a disease. However, the Israelites did not have this understanding of medical science at that time.



QUARANTINE

Nevertheless, Yahweh protected them by giving them the laws about quarantine.

Leviticus 13:1–6

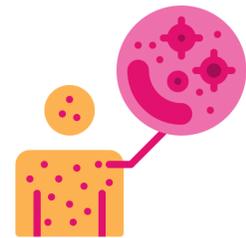
¹ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ² “If anyone has a swelling or a rash or discolored skin that might develop into a serious skin disease, that person must be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons.

³ The priest will examine the affected area of the skin. If the hair in the affected area has turned white and the problem appears to be more than skin-deep, it is a serious skin disease, and the priest who examines it must pronounce the person ceremonially unclean.

⁴ “But if the affected area of the skin is only a white discoloration and does not appear to be more than skin-deep, and if the hair on the spot has not turned white, the priest will quarantine the person for seven days.

⁵ On the seventh day the priest will make another examination. If he finds the affected area has not changed and the problem has not spread on the skin, the priest will quarantine the person for seven more days.

⁶ On the seventh day the priest will make another examination. If he finds the affected area has faded and has not spread, the priest will pronounce the person ceremonially clean. It was only a rash. The person's clothing must be washed, and the person will be ceremonially clean.



The instructions were very detailed, very practical and also very necessary if the priests were to know what to do. God showed practical concern for man's body and health.

Example 2: God taught the people to clean themselves.

God told the people that after they handled dead animals or touched a dead body, they needed to wash themselves or bathe, and also wash their clothes.

Numbers 19:7a, 11–12

[After sacrificing animals] ⁷ “Then the priest must wash his clothes and bathe himself in water.

¹¹ “All those who touch a dead human body will be ceremonially unclean for seven days. ¹² They must purify themselves on the third and seventh days with the water of purification; then they will be purified.

This seems like common sense to us today. However, this was not always the case.

Dr Ignaz Semmelweis was a Hungarian medical doctor who lived in the early 1800s. In the Vienna hospital where he worked, he found that many women who came in to give birth ended up dying even if they had come in healthy. They died of a special childbirth fever caused by infection. Why? The doctors were going from one patient to another, examining dead women and then immediately moving on to treat healthy patients.

In his own maternity ward, Dr Ignaz discovered that if doctors washed their hands between seeing patients, far fewer women died. He proposed that doctors wash their hands with antiseptic wash. However, many doctors were not convinced and they ridiculed him. As a result, he had a nervous breakdown and finally died in a mental asylum.

Only after his death did other scientists discover “germs” and could explain why washing hands prevented the spread of germs.

Yahweh did not explain the idea of germs to the Israelites, but He gave them practical instructions of what to do in the everyday situations that they faced. In obeying God’s instructions, they would have saved themselves from infections.

Example 3: The timing of circumcision.

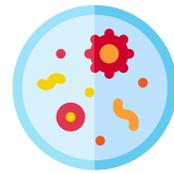
Yahweh told Abraham that every male born into his family and all who belonged to him needed to be circumcised on the eighth day.

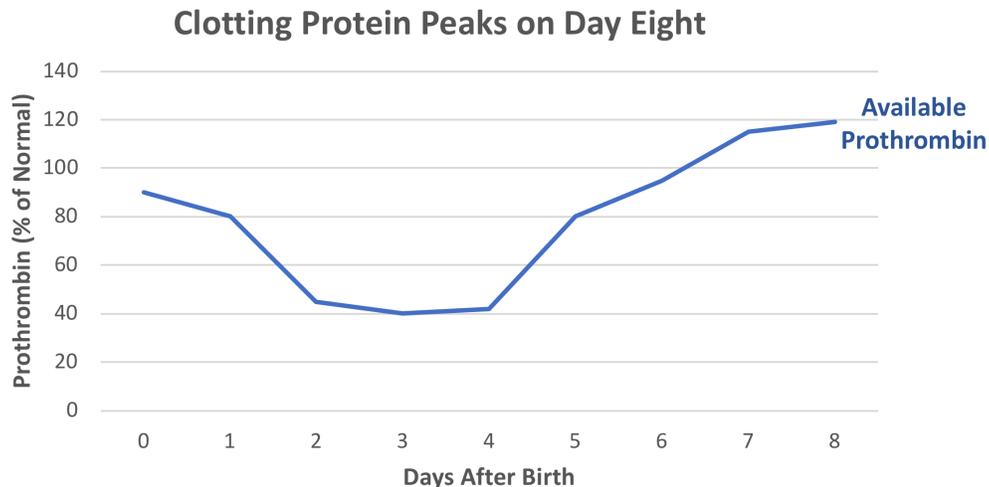
Genesis 17:12

From generation to generation, every male child must be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth.

Why the eighth day? Was God being fussy or picky?

The Israelites would not have known why but modern medicine has learnt that when a baby is eight days old, their blood clotting ability is at its best. This is because a baby’s level of prothrombin, which helps in blood clotting, is highest on the eighth day. This is very important to prevent the baby from bleeding to death.





If babies were circumcised on their first day, one out of 400 babies would have bleeding problems. These are very poor odds. One out of 400 is especially not comforting if that were your baby!

The eighth day was the best day for circumcision. Moses would not have known that. And Abraham certainly wouldn't have either. How would mankind even have the knowledge to think up these rules? But God, the Creator of mankind knows. He designed mankind and knows best how we thrive.

B. God cares for His creation and gave laws for man to take care of it.

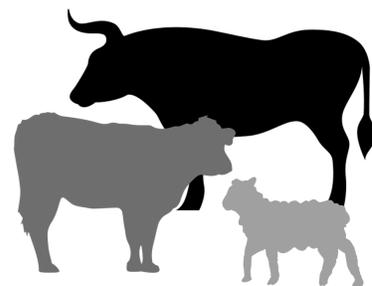
When Yahweh created the world, He meant for man to be the under-lord, taking care of nature and all creatures. God didn't take away this responsibility after the Fall.

In fact, His fourth commandment ensured that animals would not be overworked but given enough rest.

Exodus 20:8–10

⁸ Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ You have six days each week for your ordinary work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work.

This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you.



God did not want people to mistreat animals in any way.

He also wanted them to be treated kindly, allowing them to snack as they worked.

Deuteronomy 25:4

“You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain.

Many of the people groups at that time treated their animals cruelly. But this commandment, as well as others, shows God’s heart of gentle care towards His creation.

Yahweh was also very specific when it came to taking care of the land. First, the land also needed to rest. Man was not supposed to overwork the land.

Exodus 23:10–11 (ESV)

¹⁰ “For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, ¹¹ but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard.



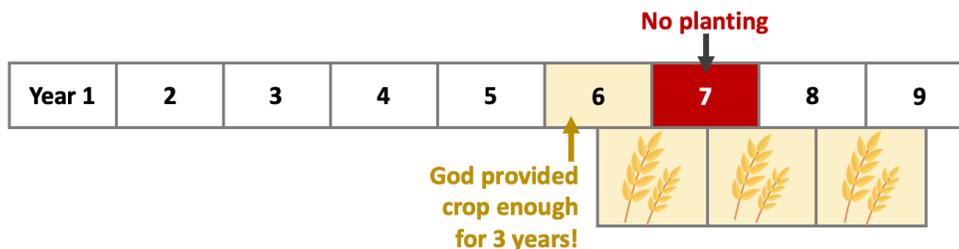
This seventh year was known as the Sabbath year. It allowed the land to be fallow. There was to be no tilling, pruning, breaking off branches, planting new crops or vines or trees, or removing dead ones. If there was any fruit produced, it could not be sold for profit but the poor and the wild animals could eat it.

To provide the farmer with food on the Sabbath year, God promised to give them three times the crop on the sixth year! God supernaturally provided what they needed for them to obey His laws!

Leviticus 25:20–22

²⁰ But you might ask, ‘What will we eat during the seventh year, since we are not allowed to plant or harvest crops that year?’

²¹ Be assured that I will send my blessing for you in the sixth year, so the land will produce a crop large enough for three years. ²² When you plant your fields in the eighth year, you will still be eating from the large crop of the sixth year. In fact, you will still be eating from that large crop when the new crop is harvested in the ninth year.



Second, God cared for the protection of vegetation. It was very common for armies at war to destroy all the trees and the plants. But God commanded the Israelites to be different.

Deuteronomy 20:19–20

¹⁹ “When you are attacking a town and the war drags on, you must not cut down the trees with your axes. You may eat the fruit, but do not cut down the trees. Are the trees your enemies, that you should attack them? ²⁰ You may only cut down trees that you know are not valuable for food. Use them to make the equipment you need to attack the enemy town until it falls.



C. God wants His people to treat each other with consideration and respect regardless of who they are or what station they have in life.

Yahweh has a tender, compassionate heart and He wants His people to reflect that same spirit and not take advantage of each other.

Exodus 22:25

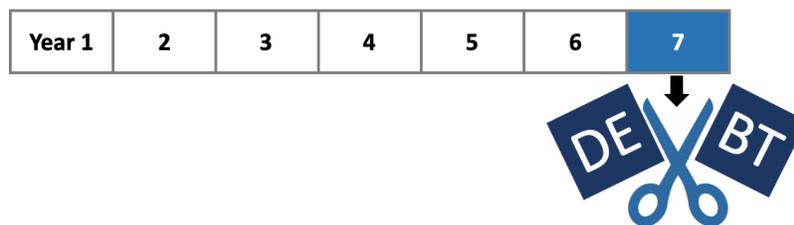
“If you lend money to any of my people who are in need, do not charge interest as a money lender would.

**Exodus 22:26–27**

²⁶ If you take your neighbor’s cloak as security for a loan, you must return it before sunset. ²⁷ This coat may be the only blanket your neighbor has. How can a person sleep without it? If you do not return it and your neighbor cries out to me for help, then I will hear, for I am merciful.



God also made loans and debts limited to a six-year repayment schedule. No other nation or people have such a unique requirement or law. Only the Israelites!



But notice how God Himself will provide for them, so that the Israelites can be generous and kind to each other. God helps them fulfil His commands easily! He did not give them impossible rules to follow!

Deuteronomy 15:1–2, 4–11

¹ “At the end of every seventh year you must cancel the debts of everyone who owes you money. ² This is how it must be done. Everyone must cancel the loans they have made to their fellow Israelites. They must not demand payment from their neighbors or relatives, for the LORD’s time of release has arrived.

⁴ “There should be no poor among you, for the LORD your God will greatly bless you in the land he is giving you as a special possession. ⁵ You will receive this blessing if you are careful to obey all the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today. ⁶ The LORD your God will bless you as he has promised. You will lend money to many nations but will never need to borrow. You will rule many nations, but they will not rule over you.

⁷ “But if there are any poor Israelites in your towns when you arrive in the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tightfisted toward them. ⁸ Instead, be generous and lend them whatever they need. ⁹ Do not be mean-spirited and refuse someone a loan because the year for canceling debts is close at hand. If you refuse to make the loan and the needy person cries out to the LORD, you will be considered guilty of sin. ¹⁰ Give generously to the poor, not grudgingly, for the LORD your God will bless you in everything you do. ¹¹ There will always be some in the land who are poor. That is why I am commanding you to share freely with the poor and with other Israelites in need.



What was very different about God’s laws, compared to other nations of the time, was that God showed no class privilege or discrimination.

Killers: For example, those who accidentally or unintentionally killed someone would have a “city of refuge” to flee to and hide in (Deuteronomy 19:2–10). In that city, they were protected and could not be killed by the victim’s relatives. This was for all people, regardless of how rich or poor they were.



This was very different from pagan laws from the same era. One of the pagan law codes of that time, called the Code of Hammurabi stated that the fines for manslaughter were different depending on who was killed. If a lower-class person were killed, the fine was small. If a higher-class person were killed, the fines were higher. The Bible does not show such discrimination.

Servants: When God talked about feasts to be celebrated in His presence, He meant it for all, including the servants. They were equal in status with those whom they worked for.



Deuteronomy 12:12

“You must celebrate there in the presence of the LORD your God with your sons and daughters and all your servants.”

Women: The pagan nations at that time treated women very badly. They were like goods to be used and abused. In stark contrast, God insisted that women be treated with dignity.

Deuteronomy 21:10–14

¹⁰ “Suppose you go out to war against your enemies and the LORD your God hands them over to you, and you take some of them as captives.

¹¹ And suppose you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you are attracted to her and want to marry her. ¹² If this happens, you may take her to your home, where she must shave her head, cut her



nails,¹³ and change the clothes she was wearing when she was captured. She will stay in your home, but let her mourn for her father and mother for a full month. Then you may marry her, and you will be her husband and she will be your wife.¹⁴ But if you marry her and she does not please you, you must let her go free. You may not sell her or treat her as a slave, for you have humiliated her.

Some people reading this passage might wonder how this can be considered as treating a woman with dignity. However, it is important to understand what was the common practice then.

For example, in the pagan nations, the men in war would capture women, rape them and then abandon them. After that, these women would no longer be wanted by other men and they would live in disgrace for the rest of their lives with no ability to support themselves. Even their own families were unlikely to take them back.

However, God's instructions were different for the Israelites. If an Israelite man wanted a war-bride, he had to follow very strict laws.

- a. First, the man brought the woman home and had her head shaved and nails cut. This took away the woman's beauty. This was possibly for the purpose of ensuring that the man was serious about her even without her beauty.
- b. Second, she took off her old clothes, signifying that she had left her past behind. This is because their clothes identified them to a certain people group.
- c. Third, she was allowed to mourn for her parents one whole month. This was a compassionate act to care for her emotional needs.
- d. If after all that, the man still wanted her, he was allowed to marry her and sleep with her. God did not allow sexual relations outside of marriage.
- e. If however, the man decided he didn't want her, he wasn't allowed to sell her for money or turn her into a slave. She was to be treated with dignity and allowed to leave peacefully.

While this law might seem very alien or strange to us today, God's heart was the care and respect for the dignity of the woman. His law was vastly different from the pagan nations of the time.

These are just a sampling of the laws. If we were to go through the other laws and ask ourselves, "What is God's heart in this law," we would see that God's laws reflect His sense of justice, love and righteousness. God's laws are full of His wisdom.

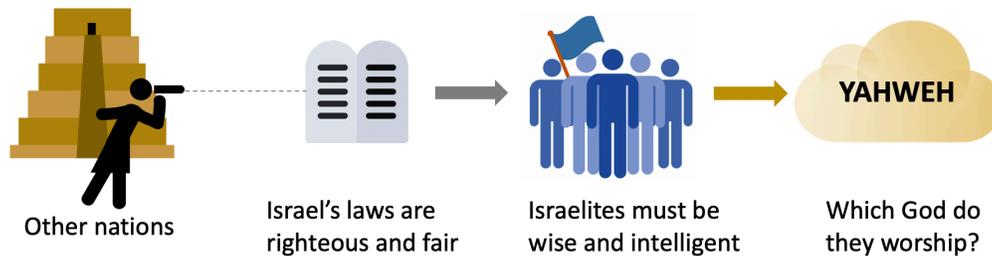
Through His laws, God wanted the people of the world to see His holiness and understand who He is. This is what Moses said to the people:

Deuteronomy 4:5–8

⁵ "Look, I now teach you these decrees and regulations just as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may obey them in the land you are about to enter and occupy.

⁶ Obey them completely, and you will display your wisdom and intelligence among the surrounding nations. When they hear all these decrees, they will exclaim, 'How wise and prudent are the people of this great nation!' ⁷ For what great nation has a god as near to

them as the LORD our God is near to us whenever we call on him? ⁸ And what great nation has decrees and regulations as righteous and fair as this body of instructions that I am giving you today?



God's Law was for individuals as well as the whole society

No society can function without:

- values
- shared moral principles and
- formalised rules.

When God gave the Law, He covered all these areas.

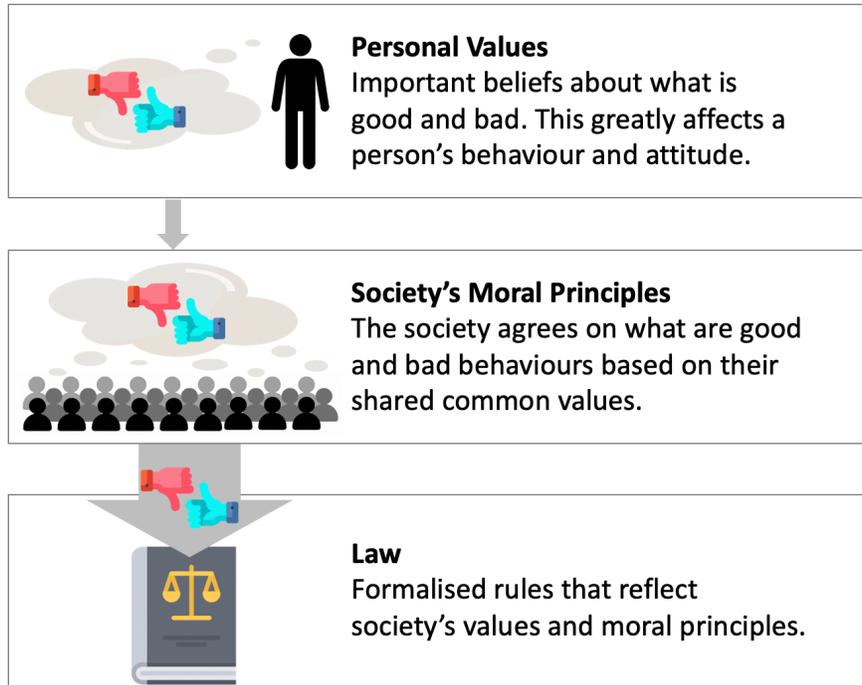
God gave His Law so that each person would know what He required of them. God taught them what their beliefs, attitudes and motives should be. He was concerned about their hearts, values and behaviour. However, God also addressed the people as a society. His laws included how they were to live together peacefully.

God's laws come from His infinite character and knowledge. Only He can make perfect laws.

In many nations today, there are generally three branches of government. They are:



With these functions of government, every nation creates its own laws and runs the country in the best way it sees fit. In general, for many of the nations, the law reflects the beliefs and values of the population.



Though mankind may form governments, it is Yahweh who knows best how to run them.

Isaiah 33:22

For the LORD is our judge,
our lawgiver, and our king.
He will care for us and save us.

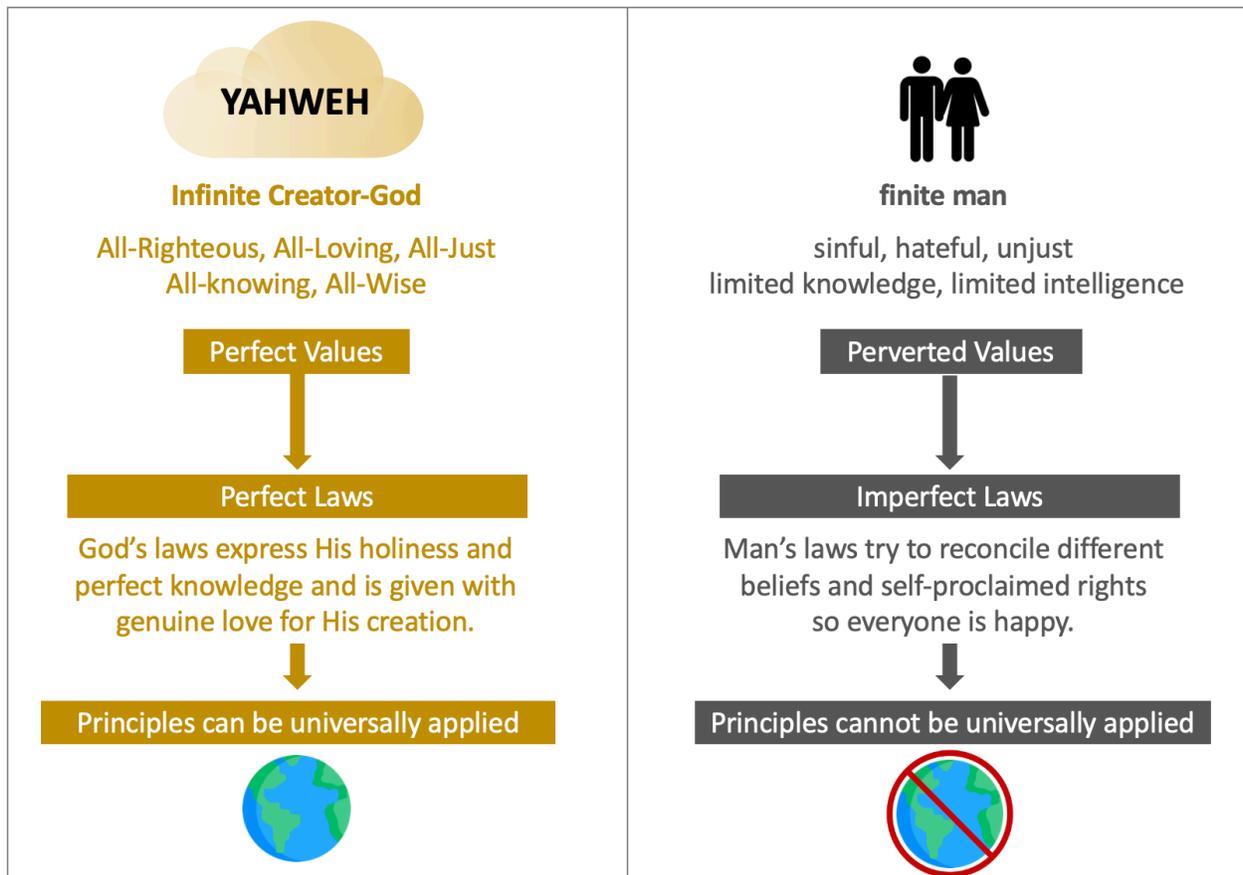
As the all-wise, all-knowing, all-loving Creator, Yahweh alone is sovereign over all three branches of government. In creating Israel's society, God allowed them to handle two of these functions. At Mount Sinai, He gave Israel instructions on how to run the nation (executive) and on how the court system should work (judiciary), but He didn't give them the power to make laws. God alone was the lawgiver and lawmaker.

God did not give Israel the power to make laws. He gave them their laws.

LEGISLATURE	EXECUTIVE	JUDICIARY
GOD GAVE THE LAW The Mosaic Law has no instructions on making law	The Mosaic Law taught Israel how to enforce the law	The Mosaic Law taught Israel how to run the court system to apply the law

Why did God do this? It was because He is the only One who can give good and righteous laws. Man cannot do that. People are sinful. All of us have many different man-made values, morals, beliefs and self-proclaimed “rights”, all based on our own sinful thinking.

When we try to make up laws, what we are actually doing is blending all these differences together to try and meet all our different needs and wants. And usually, the most powerful and vocal groups in our society get to define the law.



Because God is all-knowing and all-wise, the principles of His laws can be universally applied and they speak to all kinds of issues across all time periods.

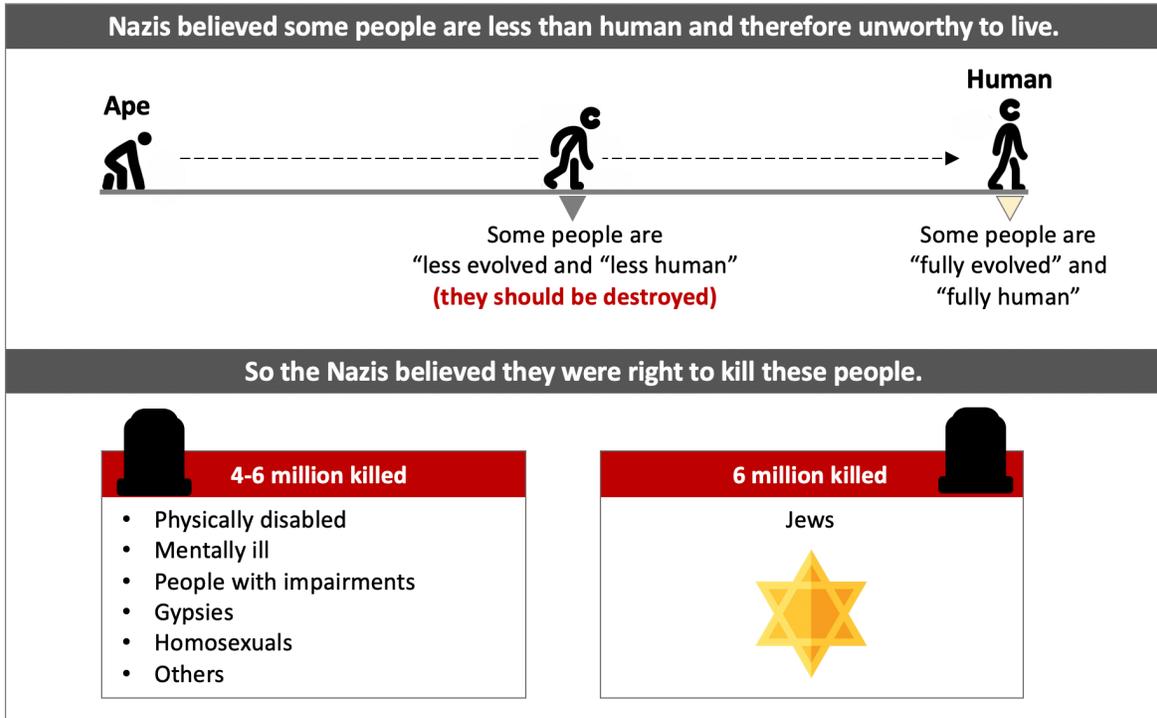
On the other hand, man's laws are limited by geography and time, and marred by man's sinfulness.

For example, after World War II, there was a series of trials in Nuremberg, Germany in 1945. These trials were to bring Nazi war criminals to justice.

Nazi officials and high-ranking military officers had been in charge of systematically murdering people whom they had deemed unworthy to live.

Why? Because the Nazis considered them as less than human.





During the trials, these Nazis claimed that they had followed German law and therefore did not commit any crime. They insisted they were innocent according to their own law.

It was a difficult trial. However, finally, the judges and the court ruled that German law only applied to Germany but the crimes they had committed were beyond their country’s laws. The court applied a “higher law” that overruled or superseded German law. In the eyes of the higher law, the Nazis were guilty of murder and other war crimes.



It is the same today. Nations may make their laws, but their laws are not perfect because they are made by sinful man. No matter what laws man creates, they are superseded by a higher law: God’s perfect law.

At Mount Sinai, God interrupted history and gave man His laws. God’s laws tell us what our values, ethics and morals need to be. And these define appropriate actions, words and behaviours. **The Bible tells us the right way to think.** God’s laws are addressed all the way down to the depths of our hearts by the One who can see our hearts. His laws are not a random list of dos and don’ts. His laws are good, perfect and righteous and a reflection of His character.

God’s Sinai Laws Addressed These Areas



Even when man was without sin, God was still the only One who could give laws. In the garden of Eden before the Fall, though mankind was innocent and without sin, they had to rely on God to tell them what was good and bad, right and wrong. **They needed God to explain and interpret their environment for them.**

How God Communicated with Adam



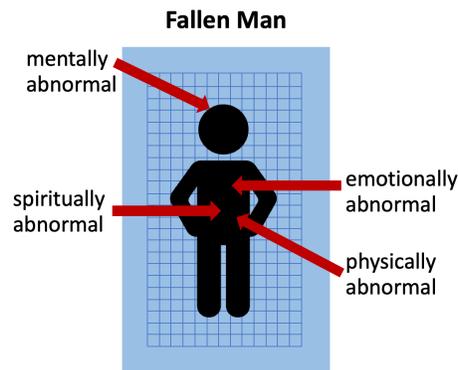
Genesis 2:15–17

¹⁵ The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. ¹⁶ But the LORD God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden— ¹⁷ except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”

God is the ultimate, solitary and final authority. Both innocent and fallen man need to rely on Him for His standards. God has the right to tell us what we should believe, how to think, and what to say and do. The correct response is to gratefully accept and submit to Him.

Is mankind good enough to make good laws?

Because all mankind is fallen, we cannot use ourselves as a measure of what is “normal”.



For example, if a survey were done in a prison and the question was: “How many times did you get into a fight last month?” The average among the prisoners might be four times a week.



A lawmaker could possibly say that if the average is a fist fight four times a week, then the law should be any person who has more than four fist fights a week should be punished.

 **Number of fist fights a week in jail**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7 and more
			Average			

Recommended law: Punish those who fight more than 4 times a week?

Though four times a week might be the average in jail, this average is neither acceptable nor desirable in society! What is needed for society would be no fist fights! So using the average in prison as a benchmark is not appropriate for society.

Likewise, using what fallen people think as the standard for “normal”, “average” or “desirable” does not lead to what is truly right and good in God’s eyes.

Which standard can fallen man use for lawmaking?

Everyone decides their own standard of right and wrong and argues it out?



Whatever the majority (or 51%) of people think is right and wrong?



What we need is not an average to gauge what is acceptable, but a calibration tool to know what is acceptable.

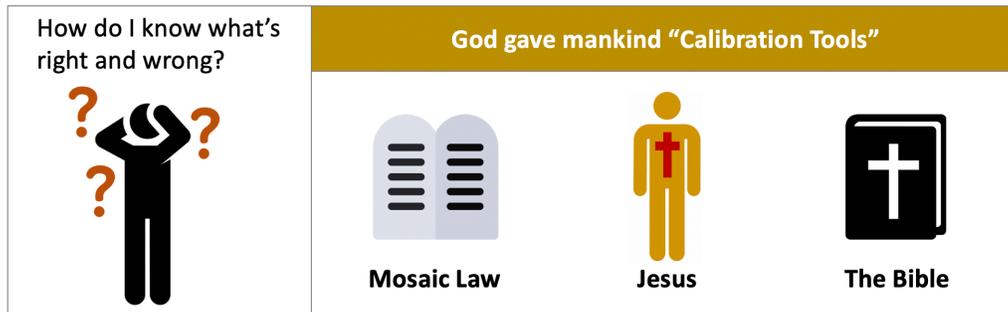
“Calibration” is a comparison. The calibration standard is normally a national standard that people all agree to follow.

To give a very simple example, say your living room clock shows it is 12:20 p.m. Your watch says it is 12:23 p.m. Your bedroom clock says it is 12:25 p.m. Which is correct?

A person can check their clocks against the “Coordinated Universal Time” (UTC). This is a time standard based on International Atomic Time. The UTC helps you “calibrate” or “compare” the times on your devices against the accurate time.



Similarly, Yahweh gave mankind “calibration tools”.



- **God’s Law** was given to the Israelites. It was their reference point for right and wrong. It was given by a holy, righteous and loving God and His laws are a reflection of His character.
- **Jesus** is also the standard for calibration. He is not a fallen man. He is perfect and we should “compare” ourselves against Him to know if we are right or wrong, righteous or unrighteous.

For example, if we want to know what love looks like, we should study Jesus’ life. We will see that His definition of love includes righteous anger, discipline, harsh scoldings, etc. Many people reject this. They make themselves the calibration standard for love instead. They choose to rely on their own fallen thinking, personal experience and opinion and they make themselves the ultimate authority and they judge Jesus.

However, if we believe that Jesus is God and He is all-righteous, all-loving, all-perfect and the ultimate judge of right and wrong, then whenever we come across something about Jesus that we can’t understand, we need to recognise that there is something wrong with us and our minds. We should then humbly pray and ask God to give our fallen minds insight and understanding as we continue to study the life of Jesus. We must not promote ourselves to be the ultimate authority or judge.

- **The Bible** as a whole is a calibration tool. It corrects our faulty thinking and reasoning. Without it, we cannot know who God is and we cannot interpret life and the gospel correctly.

Man is finite, has limited knowledge, limited experience and a faulty ability to reason. Mankind cannot create good laws.

Which standard can fallen man use for lawmaking?

<p>Everyone decides their own standard of right and wrong and argues it out?</p> 	<p>Whatever the majority (or 51%) of people think is right and wrong?</p> 	<p>The Creator-God's standard because He is the ultimate authority?</p> <p>YAHWEH</p>
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Real law can only come from God, not finite, fallen man. When Gentile nations make laws, they would be wise to model them after God's laws because God is righteous and holy and the laws He made are in line with His perfect character.

To love Yahweh means to obey Him

When we say we love someone, we often think about feelings: how we feel towards them or how they make us feel about ourselves. This is how many people understand "love". It is based largely on emotion. Feelings are a gift from God and they are also a reflection of Him. We know this because the book The Song of Solomon deals with marital love and sex, and talks a lot about feelings.

However, feelings and emotions tend to be unstable. They change depending on how our day is going, what our last conversation was about, how we had been treated by people we care about, etc. If we define "love" using emotion, our relationships will not be very stable. One day it might be good and another day it might be bad.

What did Yahweh mean when He asked the Israelites to love Him? Is it to have a feeling of love toward Him? No. In the Bible, **to love God is to obey Him.**



John 14:21

Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them."

Why does God do that? It sounds very strange, almost unfeeling and cold to link “love” to “obey”. However, we need to remember some things:

- **The danger of emotion is that it is unstable.** One day we might “feel” we love God, and another day we might feel angry towards Him and believe we have stopped loving Him. Worse still, we might feel that God has stopped loving us also. None of these may be true at all.
- **Our emotions cannot be overflowing like we’re on a high every day.** God made us so He knows how we function and how our bodies operate. He knows that we cannot be at 100% emotion every day for a long period of time. We will just crash!



God knows we need something that is objective. We need something that can sustain us day after day. So actually, it is a great assurance to us to know that God views obedience as love. This is because even on days when we don’t “feel” like we love God, if we continue to be committed to Him and obey Him, we are loving Him. And this will please Him!

Jesus the Perfect Law Keeper

When we read through the Old Testament, we see that the Israelites were never ever able to keep their contract with Yahweh. If they were hoping to save themselves from eternal separation from God through their own “righteousness”, history proves they didn’t make it.

The standard of righteousness that they would have needed is to obey the entire law all of the time. Breaking just one law during their lifetimes meant that they had failed.

James 2:10

For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God’s laws.



This standard is impossible for man to achieve.

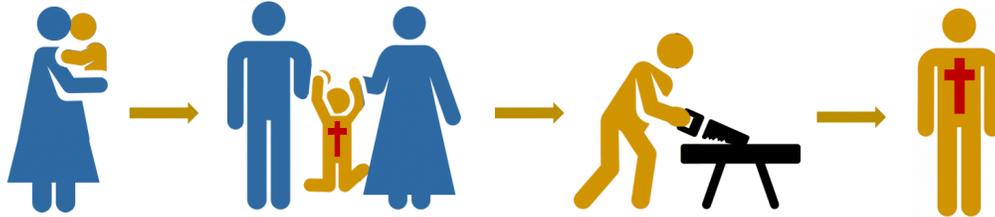
Why then did God give them the laws? Was it to sabotage them? No.

The people wrongly believed they were “good”. So God gave the laws to prove to them that they were not “good”. In fact, God gave the laws to the Israelites to show them just how sinful they actually were.

Romans 3:19–20

¹⁹ Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. ²⁰ For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.

Some people wonder why didn't Jesus just die as our Saviour while He was young, or even as a baby. This is because Jesus needed to have lived a perfect life, obeying and fulfilling all of God's laws. It is this record of a perfect life that He needs to give to man. This is why Jesus is the perfect Law Keeper and why only He can be our Saviour.



Do believers today have to obey the Old Testament laws?

Simply put, the answer is **NO**. Yahweh made a contract with the Israelites, not with Christians. God gave the Law to the Israelites, not to Christians. The blessings and cursings in the Law are meant for Israel, not Christians.

	 Mosaic Covenant
 Parties	God and the 12 tribes of Israel (sons of Jacob)
 Promises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blessings for obeying all the laws • Cursings for disobeying the laws
 Signatories	God (with the sign of the Sabbath)
 Founding sacrifice	Exodus 24:4–8
 Type	Conditional

God's history with the Israelites taught them about His character, how He relates to man and why they need a Saviour. God had a specific purpose for everything He did with the Israelites. Like Israel, we too can learn the same lessons but the Law is not for us to fulfil.

When Jesus died on the cross, He fulfilled all the requirements of God's Law.

Romans 10:4

For Christ has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given. As a result, all who believe in him are made right with God.

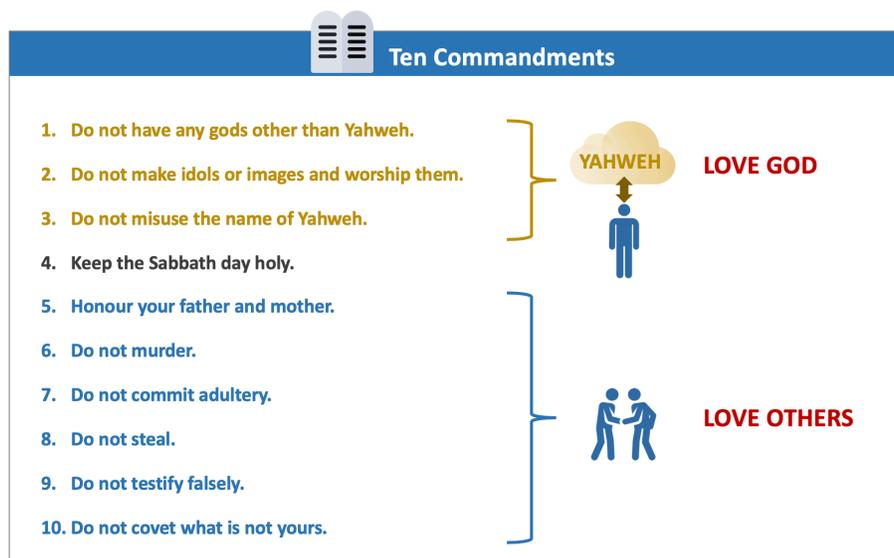
However, in place of Old Testament law, Christians are to obey Jesus. In the following passage, a Pharisee asked Jesus what is most important about the Law. Jesus replied with just two instructions: love Yahweh and love others. If we obey these two instructions faithfully, we will be doing what God wants for us.

Matthew 22:36–40

³⁶ “Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?” ³⁷ Jesus replied, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

Where did Jesus get this from? These principles are from the Mosaic Law. For example, the Ten Commandments are precisely about loving God and loving others:

- **To love God today**, obviously we will not:
 - worship other gods (Commandment #1)
 - make idols (Commandment #2) or
 - misuse God’s name (Commandment #3).
- **And in loving others**, we will:
 - honour our parents (Commandment #5)
 - not commit murder (Commandment #6)
 - not commit adultery (Commandment #7)
 - not steal (Commandment #8)
 - not malign others (Commandment #9) and
 - not covet what they have (Commandment #10).



The Law of Christ

In the New Testament, Jesus and the writers give many instructions on how to love God and love others. The apostle Paul calls this “the law of Christ”.

Galatians 6:2

Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:19–21

¹⁹ Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. ²⁰ When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. ²¹ When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ.

Interestingly, even Paul, a true Jew says that the law of Christ supersedes the Old Testament law! He says that when he is with the Gentiles, he doesn’t follow the Mosaic Law, but he follows the law of Christ. And he is perfectly secure knowing that God is all right with that.

In fact, Jews today who believe in Jesus for their salvation also do not need to observe the Mosaic Law. Jesus had fulfilled the Law for all who trust in Him for salvation, both Jews and non-Jews. All who are saved by Jesus are saved by grace and not by works of the law.

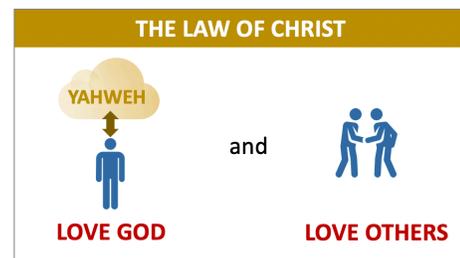
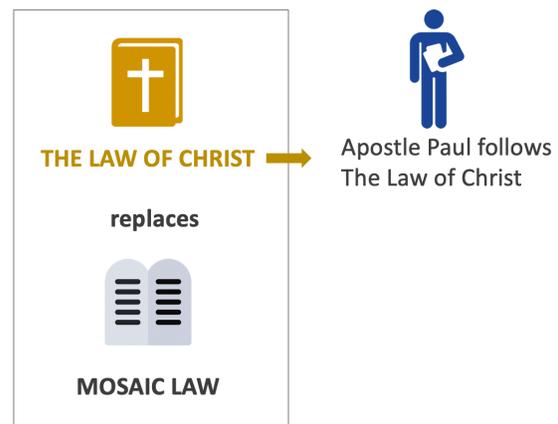
Paul explains this:

Romans 11:5–6

⁵ It is the same today, for a few of the people of Israel have remained faithful because of God’s grace—his undeserved kindness in choosing them. ⁶ And since it is through God’s kindness, then it is not by their good works. For in that case, God’s grace would not be what it really is—free and undeserved.

So, loving God and loving each other is the summary of the law of Christ.

We should pay attention and focus on these “laws”. When we obey them, we will please God with our obedient lives and we will also live well with others.



In addition to the law of Christ, the Bible also tells us that God gave Christ's law to us in another way as well.

Our consciences

The Bible says that as believers, we have God's law working in our hearts through our consciences. God's law makes us reflect, think and consider what is right and wrong. This is what the apostle Paul said about Gentile believers.



Romans 2:14–15

¹⁴ Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. ¹⁵ They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.

In summary, Gentile believers today do not follow the Mosaic Law. We follow the law of Christ and rely on the Holy Spirit's leading through our consciences.

Example of the Law of Christ in the New Testament

As Christians, we do not have a list of 10 rules or 613 rules, but Jesus and the New Testament writers gave many clear examples of how the law of Christ should look like in everyday life. Here is just one example:

Romans 12:9–21

⁹ Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. ¹⁰ Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. ¹¹ Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically.

¹² Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. ¹³ When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them.

¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

¹⁷ Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. ¹⁸ Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

¹⁹ Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say,

"I will take revenge;
I will pay them back,"
says the LORD.

²⁰ Instead,

“If your enemies are hungry, feed them.
If they are thirsty, give them something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap
burning coals of shame on their heads.”

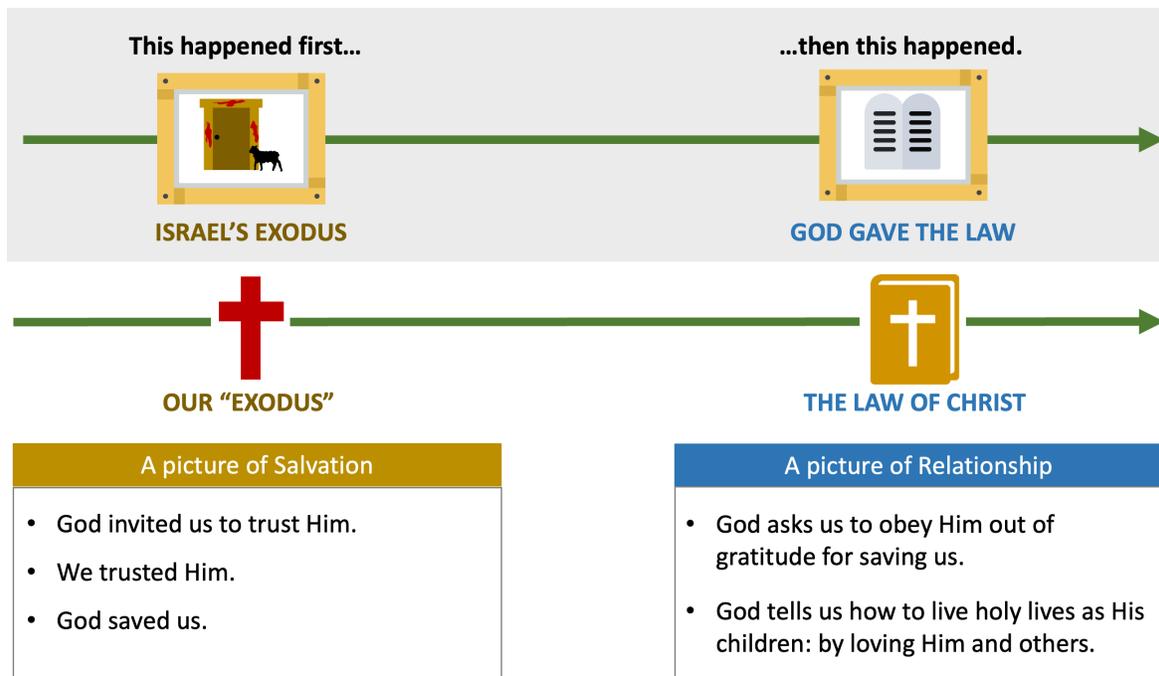
²¹ Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

There are a lot of instructions in this short passage! (How many can you count?)

Do we want to know the law of Christ intimately? The New Testament is filled with practical instructions and encouragement on how we are to live. Living in this way will please God. This law of Christ is what believers today should live by.

Why isn't there a fixed number of rules? Perhaps God wants us to know that there are limitless ways of showing love. And we should love not because of legalistic reasons or because we want to avoid punishment, but out of genuine love for God and concern for others.

God saved Israel out of Egypt and then asked them to obey Him out of gratitude. Similarly, God saved us from eternal death and asked us to actively participate in a loving relationship with Him and our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us therefore determine to constantly seek Him and rely on the Holy Spirit's help to outdo each other in love.



In the box above, it mentioned all of the Ten Commandments except Commandment #4, the Sabbath. How are Christians supposed to treat that?

Are Christians supposed to keep the Sabbath (Commandment #4)?

The Sabbath was God's "signature" on the Mosaic Covenant. It was also the unique mark of the Israelites, reminding them of the covenant they had with Yahweh. No other nation in the world took a day of rest in honour of their god. The Sabbath was therefore Israel's mark of distinction. It made them different from every other nation.



Day 1	2	3	4	5	6	Day 7
work	work	work	work	work	work	SABBATH REST

The Sabbath was also put in place so that Israel, its people, its animals and its land could **rest from work**. This is what observing the Sabbath means.

Jesus also told His disciples that they were to be distinct in the way they live. And throughout the Gospels, Jesus tells those who believe in Him how to live and act so others would see the difference.

The other New Testament writers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, also provided more information on how to be distinct from unbelievers. Interestingly, neither Jesus nor the New Testament writers talk about the Sabbath command. It is the only one of the Ten Commandments that the New Testament does not repeat or remind people about.

Since Christians are not parties to the Mosaic Covenant, they are free to decide if they want to keep the Sabbath or not. No believer should judge another if they make a different choice.

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Colossian church, told them that **Jesus had already fulfilled the law**. This means that believers have the freedom to decide what to do with the Sabbath and other matters of the Mosaic Law. They are no longer tied to the mere actions or rules about foods and festivals.

Colossians 2:16–17

¹⁶ So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. ¹⁷ For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality.

Also, it is important to remember that **the Bible does not say that the Sabbath was to be a day of worship**. Some people do use Saturdays, the Sabbath, as a day of worship. This is fine. Others set aside Sunday or some other day as their day of worship. That also is fine.

In fact, Jewish believers in the early church chose Sunday as their day of worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2) because Jesus resurrected on a Sunday (Mark 16:1; John 20:1).

Whatever believers decide, they just need to be convinced of what they are doing and why. And they are not to judge others who do differently.

Romans 14:5

In the same way, some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think every day is alike. You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable.

One thing needs to be clear: Christians are free from obeying Old Testament law. We can't obey them even if we tried. All it takes is breaking one of the laws once and in God's view, we would have broken all of them. The Mosaic Covenant treated all 613 laws as a unified body of law. One either accepted all of them or rejected all of them as a whole. No one was to pick and choose which they thought they could obey and ignore the others.

If we are struggling over whether or not to obey the Law, we need to ask ourselves: what is our reason for wanting to obey the Mosaic Law? Do we think we will please God or become righteous before Him if we obey the Law? The Bible makes it clear that trying to obey the Law is impossible. We cannot please God that way.

Because man is unable to fulfil the Law, Jesus had to fulfil them for us. Therefore, let us not be legalistic and police ourselves and everyone around us about keeping the Law. Jesus obeyed the Law fully for mankind and deposited that righteous, obedient life into all believers. Then He instructs us: obey Me. So following the law of Christ is our work of gratitude for what Jesus has done for us.

Instead of asking ourselves if we are obeying the Mosaic Law, the more important question is this: do we love Yahweh with all our heart? And if we do, God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, will guide us to the loving words, actions, habits, choices and behaviours that He wants us to have.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. What kind of relationship should we have with the Law that God gave the Israelites?
2. Why do you think believers struggle to know what to do with Old Testament laws?
3. Knowing that God's Law is based on His perfection and man's laws are based on our sin nature, how should we treat the laws of our country?



Pre-reading for next lesson: Exodus 31:12–18, 32:1–34:35