

The Old Testament Law

Read Leviticus 19:1-4, 9-18; Matthew 7:24-27

The Old Testament law, contained in portions of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, has a bad reputation among many modern Christians. To them, it seems strange and completely outdated.

Read it, and yes, some of the specific regulations will seem odd. They were written for a different time, place, and situation. But the more I study the law, the more amazed I am at its beauty and depth. It legislates compassion on the needy, even at the expense of private rights of ownership. It works to shape a people of justice, righteousness, and generosity, a people who consider all fellow citizens to be their brothers and sisters, a people who, above everything else, love God with all their heart, soul, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5).

This is the law God promised to write on the hearts of His people (Jeremiah 31:33). This is the law Jesus came, not to destroy, but to fulfill (Matthew 5:17). This is the law whose essence is loving God and loving others (Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8).

Whether the law was ever followed perfectly is not the point. It envisions a community of believers that will one day culminate in the Kingdom of God. For myself, I'm coming to think of the law, less as a set of specific rules tailored to a specific people in a specific cultural situation, and more as one step in God forming for Himself a holy people who are truly His own - a people of justice, mercy, faith, and love. The essence of the law is living at peace with God and thus at peace with each other.

The law also teaches another invaluable truth: God's wisdom does us no good until we obey it. God's wisdom demands trust. It demands response. It demands action. It demands change.

Remember Jesus' parable about the wise man and the foolish man (Matthew 7:24-27). Both men had heard God's wisdom. Both men knew His wisdom. The entire difference between a wise life and a foolish life, between blessing and destruction, was simple obedience. God's wisdom cannot bless us until we obey it.

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