

Dr. David L. Mathewson, New Testament Theology, Session 29, Christians and the Old Testament Law

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his lecture series on New Testament Theology. This is session 29, Christians and the Old Testament Law.

We began the last session, or we ended the last session, by looking at James and James' emphasis on obedience.

All throughout the entire book, James overemphasizes the need for good works and the need for obedience. In a sense, in James, you find little of the detailed theological development and reflection that you find in Paul's letters, for example. That doesn't mean there's no theology in James.

It just means that James is more interested in the practical outcomes of that and emphasis on good works and obedience. Probably the text that is most significant in that regard is James chapter 2 and verses 14-26. Beginning with verse 14, what good is it, my brothers? I won't read the whole thing but just snippets of part of it; what good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can that faith save them? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food; if one of you says to them, go in peace, keep warm, and be fed, but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if not accompanied by actions, is dead.

After giving a couple of examples, verse 20, you foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? He gives an example from Abraham's life, an example from Rahab's life, and two Old Testament examples. He then ends in verse 24, saying that a person is justified or considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. Now, it's this text that has often brought James in conflict with Paul, at least in some people's minds, whereas in Galatians, even verbally, there seems to be a formal contradiction in what James and Paul say. Paul says in Galatians 2.16 that we know that a person is justified not by works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.

Now you have James saying in chapter 2, verse 24, that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. The NIV obscures the very close verbal similarity between those two verses in Galatians 2 and here, but when one reads those, it appears that they are, in a sense, at odds with each other. Now, what I don't want to do is make James sound just like a version of Paul like this is James' version of Paul.

I think one of the legacies of Martin Luther and the Reformation is that we've learned to read the entire New Testament through the lenses of Paul's letters, especially

Galatians and Romans. James and some of the other smaller books, because they come at the end of the New Testament, get pushed out in the margins. Often, what we end up doing is making them sound like James' version of Paul or John's version of Paul, Jude's version, or Peter's version of Paul.

I don't want to do that. I want to let James be James. However, within the broader canonical context of the New Testament, I think it is. Eventually, it is necessary to ask the question of how the two books relate to each other within the broader canon.

First of all, I would suggest to you that given the survey of the Pauline literature, Paul's teaching on ethics and obedience, I think it becomes clear that even Paul thought that works were the inevitable result of faith, Ephesians 2.8-10. It is still perhaps necessary to recognize that Paul and James don't quite see it exactly the same way, or they don't phrase it exactly the same way and discuss it in exactly the same way. Perhaps some of this has to do with the different situations that they are addressing. But I think the way, and I think first of all, we need to recognize that even though they might emphasize things and phrase things differently without making James sound like Paul or Paul sound like James, which we are less prone to do, it is important to understand that at the end of the day, they are not at odds because Paul likewise understands that obedience is the inevitable result of belonging to the new covenant and experiencing the transforming life of the new creation.

So, obedience is a corollary to that. James also then makes clear that obedience is absolutely necessary, and without it, faith is dead, and faith is unable to save. In fact, he uses that language of faith, faith working together with works or faith being perfected by the works that it does.

But it seems to me that the key is to note the different situations that James and Paul address, and there are other ways to describe their function and role within the New Testament canon. But I think the starting point is noting the different pastoral situations that James and Paul address. Paul is addressing a situation in both Galatians and Romans where Gentile Christians are being required by Judaizers to submit to the law of Moses as a requirement for and a demonstration that they are the true people of God.

They are being asked to identify as God's true people by taking upon themselves the law of Moses for male circumcision, for everybody, the requirements of the Sabbath, and food laws as an indication that they are the true people of God. In that context, Paul says no, you are justified, you are declared righteous before God, and you have a right standing before God based solely on faith in Jesus Christ and not by taking upon oneself works of the law. In James, however, the situation is the direct opposite.

Notice what James says in verses 15 and 16. Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, go in peace, keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In other words, James is addressing a situation where people claim to have faith, yet when they see someone in dire need, they refuse to do anything about it.

Later on, he describes those who hoard wealth, those who oppress the poor, and those who treat the poor as second-class citizens at the beginning of chapter 2. Those who oppress the marginalized and the poor still claim to have faith in the person of Jesus Christ. So, James goes on and says, show me your faith without deeds. I will show my faith by my deeds. Verse 19, you believe there is one God, good; even the demons believe that, and they shudder.

So, James is addressing a faith that is an assent to the fact that God is one, a belief in God that does not result in a transformed life. One acclaimed faith that is not accompanied by good works, especially deeds of charity towards the poor. Addressing a situation where people claim to have faith, yet when they see someone in dire need, they simply turn a blind eye and refuse to do anything about it.

In that context, James asks how faith can save you. Verse 26, as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. So, in that sense, a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. Not by a faith that is a mere verbal assent to the fact that God is one, but a faith that actually moves one and motivates one to reach out to the poor and the marginalized and to meet their needs.

So, it seems to me that part of understanding the difference between James and Paul is to understand the different situations that they address pastorally. So ultimately, what I think we should conclude from the discussion of James and Paul in the New Testament so far is that I don't think we see a conflict in the New Testament between faith and works, but instead, true saving faith that places us in union with Christ in a new creation and under the new covenant which promises God's law written in our hearts and the Holy Spirit will inevitably produce good works. Faith that does not produce good works and faith that is not accompanied by good works are, by definition, not true saving faith.

So, the question is not whether we are saved by faith or works. The question is, what is the nature of true saving faith? And I would argue for both Paul and James, maybe even more so for James, faith produces a transformed life of the new covenant and of the new creation. Ultimately, Paul and James are not in conflict; however, their emphases or ways of phrasing things or going about things are different. Ultimately, within the New Testament, we should see them as not in conflict, but both agree that true saving faith that joins us to Christ inevitably is marked by and accompanied by good works of obedience.

As Thomas Schreiner says in his New Testament theology, faith in God is dynamic and produces fruit, and if the fruit is lacking, it calls into question whether that faith is genuine. First John, to move on to another so-called general epistle. 1 John has much to say about the response of obedience.

In chapter 2 and verses 3 through 6, we know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. So, keeping his commands is evidence or proof that we know God and have entered into a saving knowledge of God himself. Whoever says I know him but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.

But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him. Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

Later on, in verse 29 of the same chapter, if you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him. Chapter 3 and verse 6, no one who lives in him in Christ sins. No one who sins has either seen him or known him.

Verse 9, this is chapter 3, no one who is born of God will sin because God's seed remains in them. They cannot sin because they have been born of God. Now, of course, John ultimately does not call for the fact that we somehow can achieve perfection in this life because he denies that earlier.

He chides the false teachers that he is addressing because they claim to be without sin. John equally says if you claim to be without sin, you make God out to be a liar. Instead, we have provision for sin through Jesus Christ.

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just through Christ to forgive sins. But ultimately, as children of God, knowing Christ and knowing God is demonstrated by obedience to God's commands. If we are born of God, again, I think the idea here is one of transformation.

Being born of God implies a transformation that inevitably produces obedience to God. A failure to respond in obedience, according to John, calls into question the reality of that. So once more, by definition, faith in God, becoming God's children, and belonging to God, by definition, requires a transformed life.

Again, we don't want to miss the theme of repentance and forgiveness of sins and turn to throwing ourselves upon God's grace and experiencing his forgiveness. But to use that as an excuse for living the kind of life that God desires, I think, is at odds with what we read in James and 1 John and Paul as well. The last book to throw in for good measure, in a sense, is Revelation to go to the very end.

We note, for example, in the messages of the seven churches, the call to overcome in the context of the book of Revelation, the call to overcome ultimately works out by refusing to compromise with the idolatrous system of the Roman Empire. Notice a couple of other interesting texts. In chapter 12 and verse 17, the offspring of the seed of the woman, in chapter 12, which I think is a symbol of the church, God's people, a Jew and Gentile as God's people, are described in verse 17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman, and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commands, and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

So, God's people are identified in Revelation as those who overcome. They refuse to compromise with the idolatrous Roman rule and with the world. Instead, they keep God's commands.

So, at the end of Revelation, in chapter 19 and verse 8, we find that the people of God at the very end are described as the bride. In verse 7, the wedding of the Lamb has come. His bride, that is, his people, has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear. Then, the author interprets that the fine linen stands for the righteous deeds, the righteous acts of God's holy people. So Revelation also ends with God's people characterized by those who trust in Christ, but also those whose lives refuse to compromise with the world, those who are characterized by following God's commands, and those who are closed with the righteous deeds of God's people.

So, the New Testament ultimately knows of no Christian who does not live a transformed life to some degree. The New Testament does not expect that everyone perhaps will live it out to the same degree, nor that there will be valleys and hills, but inevitably, as a result of living under the New Covenant and under the transformed power of the kingdom of God and the new creation, belonging to Jesus Christ and sharing in his death to sin in the old era and sharing in the resurrection life of the new creation inevitably will produce the fruit of that reality. So, at the end of the day, faith and works are not in conflict, but a true faith in Jesus Christ that saves is inevitably one that produces the works of the kingdom and a life lived in obedience to God's commands.

So, what I want to do now is kind of a subset of that, which is very, very briefly entering into a complex discussion. I can't hope to solve all the issues or raise them all, and I can't hope to answer all your questions and enter into all the debate, but simply trace out some broad lines of the issue of how the Old Testament law that is the Mosaic law, fit into all this? When we think of Christian obedience when we think in terms of the New Testament, the obedience of God's people in Christ, what role does the Mosaic law play in this? Because when you go back to the Old Testament, the law of Moses plays a dominant role in instructing God's people regarding God's

will for his people. Starting in Exodus chapter 2, I would even, again, you could perhaps go back, when you think in terms of obedience, all the way back to the Garden of Eden, where God called upon Adam and Eve to respond in obedience to his commands, but now we find in starting with Exodus 20, more specifically God in entering into a covenant relationship with his people, now instructing his people by giving them the law, giving the law through Moses to his people.

So now the question is, what role does the Old Testament law play in the New Testament and in Christian living and obedience? And as I said, this is a topic far too complex, nor am I equipped to navigate all the difficulties and details, but one that's too complex to treat in any exhaustive detail and complete satisfaction in this amount of time. But again, we'll sketch out some of the broad contours. Again, with the starting point of the New Covenant, we find that God, in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36, God will write his law on the hearts of his people so this seems to suggest an ongoing role for the law of Moses.

And even in the Gospels, sometimes the Gospels appear to affirm the Old Testament law. Sometimes, Matthew and Luke are understood as being more conservative in their approach to the law of Moses. I want to start by answering the question, what role does the Mosaic law play in the lives of God's people? And it's important to understand we're talking about the law of Moses, not just law in general.

Again, the New Testament authors are quite happy to command God's people to do certain things. So, we're not talking about whether the Christians are subject to any law or any instructions, but we are asking the question of whether and what role the law of Moses from the Old Covenant plays in the life of God's people. The starting point, I think, is Matthew chapter 5 and verses 17 through 20.

There are a number of texts we could look at in the Gospels, but once again, we don't have time to look at them all. But I want to look at what is one of the most programmatic statements by Jesus himself regarding the law of Moses. Jesus says, again, in the context of the inbreaking kingdom and the transforming power of God's kingdom, in this programmatic statement, Jesus says in verses 17 and following, 17 through 20 of Matthew 5, Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter nor the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished. And I'll stop right there.

What I want to focus on is the language of Jesus fulfilling the law. When we think of the word fulfill, often this is interpreted to mean that Jesus fulfills the law by keeping it perfectly, upholding it, and affirming it, and I would agree that that is indeed true.

But, in light of chapter 2, in light of chapter 2 where we see Jesus fulfilling the law, and in chapter 3 as well, we see over, and over Jesus' life, even in his early childhood and then into the beginning of his ministry, we find that Jesus' life is a fulfillment of Old Testament texts.

So, Jesus' movement in chapter 2 of his early childhood, everything, everywhere he goes, took place to fulfill what was spoken in Isaiah the Prophet. Chapter 4 and verse 14, at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, took place to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah. So, you have this theme of fulfillment where what is going on is Jesus' very life and ministry is a fulfillment of Old Testament texts.

They point to him. They prophesy of him. They anticipate.

And he is their goal. He is what they pointed to so that, in that sense, he fulfills them. And I think we should understand Jesus' statement in Matthew 5 in the same way.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the law, not by keeping it or upholding it and affirming it and enforcing it, but primarily, Jesus fulfills it because he is what the law pointed to. He fulfills it. Jesus fulfills the law in his own teaching, especially in the Sermon on the Mount; I take the rest of the Sermon on the Mount; Jesus' teaching is the fulfillment of the law because his teaching is the goal.

Jesus' own life, ministry, and teaching are the goals of the law and prophets, what they pointed to, so that he fulfills them. And Jesus then can go on and say that the law will not pass away. It will not be destroyed.

Not one iota, not one stroke of the pen, will pass away until all is accomplished. So, the law will not pass away, but it will find its validity and enduring value in light of how it gets fulfilled in Jesus Christ. So, there is both continuity and discontinuity.

Yes, the law continues. Yes, the law is affirmed. Yes, the law is shown to be valid, but only in light of how it gets fulfilled in Jesus Christ's ministry and teaching.

The kingdom of God brings about a transformation so that the law must ultimately be understood in relationship to Jesus Christ, who now brings the kingdom. And again, the rest of Matthew 5 through Matthew 7 and elsewhere, I think, is a demonstration of how Jesus' teaching is the fulfillment of the law. It's what it pointed to.

And sometimes when you read the rest of Matthew 5, where Jesus will say, you've heard that it was said, and he'll quote a section of the Old Testament, and then he'll say, but I say to you, I think we find specific examples of Jesus fulfilling the law. Sometimes the law gets intensified so that it's no longer the physical act of murder,

but now it's hatred. Sometimes, it gets set aside so that we're no longer to swear an oath at all.

Or, more broadly, Jesus' own death fulfills the sacrifices. But Jesus clearly is, I think, suggesting that the law must now be interpreted and understood in relation to Jesus Christ, how it points to him, and how he brings it to completion and fulfillment. And it's interesting that Matthew ends, the Gospel of Matthew ends in chapter 28 with Jesus telling his disciples, go therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to keep the Torah or the law of Moses.

No, I think it's teaching them to keep all that I have commanded you throughout the Book of Matthew, including the Sermon on the Mount. But again, what Jesus has commanded them is nothing less than the fulfillment of the Old Testament law, the law of Moses. Now, we could look at other texts throughout the Gospels, and we could look at other texts in the New Testament, but I want to move on to Paul's letters.

But we must keep in mind that already Jesus has told him that at the climax of salvation history with the coming of Christ, Jesus now fulfills the entirety of the Old Testament, including the law, so that now he does not come to do away with it and set aside, but to bring it to its completion and fulfillment. And so, the law must be understood through the lenses of fulfillment in Christ. Now, to move on to the Pauline literature, probably in no other group of writings in the New Testament do we find addressed as much as we find, probably because of the situations Paul was addressing, but we don't find outside of Paul's letters anywhere else where the issue of the law's relationship to Christians, to the people of God, is addressed than we do in Paul's letters.

The first thing to mention is I think Paul is clear that the era of the Old Covenant and the Mosaic law that belongs to it has now come to an end with the coming of Christ. The clearest argument that Paul makes for that, I think, is found in Galatians chapters 3 and 4. And if you recall, in the book of Galatians, Paul is trying to convince Gentile Christians in the churches in Galatia not to give in to the Judaizers and submit to the Mosaic law. And so, part of his argument, kind of at the heart of his argument, is chapters 3 and 4, wherein these two chapters, Paul is going to argue that the law played a temporary role until the coming of the promise in Jesus Christ, or until the coming of Christ.

This is especially true in chapter 3 of Galatians and verses 15 and following, where Paul argues a number of things. First of all, he says that a law and covenant that came 430 years after the Abrahamic covenant did not overturn it. And then in verses 23-25 he uses a series of metaphors that further emphasize the temporary function of the law.

So, what Paul does is demonstrate that the promises made to Abraham ultimately don't get fulfilled in the Mosaic covenant, which probably the Judaizers were arguing, but ultimately get fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. So, the Mosaic covenant does not overturn or assert the role of or trump the covenant made under Abraham. Instead, the covenant made with Abraham ultimately gets fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

And the law came along 430 years later, Paul says. In other words, he is arguing historically from the Old Testament that the Mosaic law played a temporary role in between the promises made to Abraham and their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ. And in verses 23-25, Paul uses a series of metaphors to demonstrate that.

Before the coming of faith, we were held in custody under the law. So, the law is seen as a guardian. We were locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed.

Faith refers to the new age of salvation and faith in Jesus Christ. So, the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under the guardian.

So, in Christ Jesus, you now are children of God through faith. So, Paul's argument is that the law played a temporary role as a guardian, pedagogue, babysitter, or childminder. Someone who kept the child in line until the child was old enough to be an heir to make his own decisions.

So, the Mosaic law was like those things in that it kept God's people and guarded them until the arrival of the promise. Until the promise of faith and the coming of Jesus Christ. And now that Christ has come, Paul says you are no longer under the law.

It has fulfilled its purpose and its role. So, the law played a temporary role until the coming of Jesus Christ. That is, the Mosaic law belongs to the old era that Paul is convinced has passed away and from which we have been redeemed.

Chapter 1, verse 4 of Galatians, where Paul actually sets you up, he is setting the readers up to read the rest of his book. When he says Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father. So, if the Mosaic law primarily belonged to the present age and now that the new age of salvation has arrived in Christ, then Paul's argument in chapters 3 and 4 is the Mosaic law belonged to that old era, which now is over because it now has reached its fulfillment in Christ and therefore the law is no longer binding authority on God's people.

So, with the coming of Christ, Paul says at the end of chapter 3 into chapter 4 in Galatians, we are now adult children. I don't think he is saying that the period of law was one of immaturity and that the Israelites or whoever submitted to the law was immature. Again, he is just using the language of inheritance, the language of sonship, and the language of adoption to demonstrate the law played a temporary function.

At the coming of Christ, now we are adult children who do not require the oversight of or the guardianship of the law of Moses. Furthermore, Paul argues Christians have already experienced the new covenant, the Holy Spirit, as a sign that they are God's true people without keeping the law. At the beginning of chapter 3 when, he says, I would like to learn just one thing from you: did you receive the spirit the assumption is that they did.

Paul is not asking them if they have the spirit or not. His assumption is they do have the spirit, the new covenant the Holy Spirit promised in the Old Testament. But now he is asking them, did you receive the spirit by works of the law or by believing in the gospel and what you heard? Are you so foolish after beginning by means of the spirit? Now, do you want to try finishing by means of the flesh? So again, I ask, did God give you his spirit and work miracles among you by works of the law or by believing what you heard? And so, Paul's whole point is, again, the law only played a temporary role until the fulfillment of the new covenant promises, until the coming of Christ.

Now that Christ has come, the old era to which the Mosaic covenant and the law belonged is now over. So, the law played a temporary role, and besides that, Paul says the law played no role in the Galatian Christians receiving the Holy Spirit. So why do they want to go back to it? Ultimately then, Paul concludes in texts like chapter 3 and verse 23 that before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed.

And then, in chapter 4 and verse 21, he says, tell me you who want to be under the law. That imagery of being under the law, I think, means to be under its authority, to be under the law as a binding authority that is over us as part of the Mosaic covenant. We see something similar in Chapter 6 and Verse 14 of Romans, a text that we've already looked at in connection with Paul's ethics teaching and obedience.

But in chapter 6 and verse 14, Paul says, for sin will no longer be your master because you are no longer under the law, the law of Moses, but you are under grace. So, Christians are no longer under the law. That is, the Mosaic law was part of the Mosaic covenant which was a temporary dispensation that now has reached its goal and climax in the person of Jesus Christ.

So, we no longer live in a time when the Mosaic law is a binding authority and force. And so Romans 6:14 says we are no longer under the law, but we are under grace. Now, in this text, Paul is not talking about two different ways of living. That is, we are trying to rely on works or rely on God's grace without works.

Again, I think Paul is talking about two different eras. The old era, the old covenant under Moses, but then the new covenant now, salvation under Christ Jesus. The new age of salvation is now fulfilled in Christ.

So, the Mosaic covenant has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in the new covenant that he has inaugurated. So, I think Paul's argument in Colossians is that it is no longer a binding force on believers. The Mosaic law played a temporary role in the outworking of God's redemptive history, a temporary role until the fulfillment of the promises until the salvation that would come in Jesus Christ reached its fulfillment so that now that Christ has come and brought about the promised new covenant and poured out his spirit, the Mosaic law is no longer a binding force on God's people.

They no longer live under it. The point it is important to understand the point is not that Christians are not obligated to keep any law or that the law of Moses no longer plays any role at all. But again, Paul suggests that Christians are no longer under the law of Moses as part of the old covenant, which is a binding authority and a binding force on their lives.

We find Paul, I think, saying something similar when we get to Colossians chapter 2. In Colossians chapter 2, Paul also addresses a group of what some people have labeled the Colossian heresy or the Colossian errorists or the false teachers, whatever you want to call them. In my opinion, the false teachers or the deviant teaching that Paul is addressing in Colossians is probably Judaism once again. In this case, unlike Galatians, I take it that this is not a Christian Jew, but probably a non-Christian sect of Judaism, perhaps similar to the apocalyptic type of Judaism or even the Qumran type of Judaism.

But the point is that they also emphasize the identity markers of what it means to be truly God's people, and they emphasize the necessity of submitting to the Old Testament law, hence disqualifying anyone else who does not conform to that. But notice Paul's language in refuting that in Colossians chapter 2. In a section where we find Paul addressing the teaching directly, he says in verse 16, therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, probably reflecting food laws in the Old Testament and in other Jewish literature or with regard to religious festival a new moon celebration or a Sabbath day. That Sabbath reference clinches it that this is a Judaism of some kind.

In fact, the phrases festival, new moon, and Sabbath occur a number of times in the Old Testament, in the Qumran text, and elsewhere in Jewish literature. But then

what Paul says next is intriguing. These things, that is, the religious festivals, the new moons, the Sabbath, the food laws, eating and drinking, are a shadow of things that were to come.

The reality, however, is now found in Jesus Christ. So, this statement, I think, in a sense, reflects something similar to what Paul was saying back in the book of Galatians in chapters 3 and 4. These things in the law functioned as a shadow that pointed to a greater reality which is Christ. These things were a shadow that has now been fulfilled by the person of Jesus Christ.

It is almost similar to the language used by the author of Hebrews. But once more, Paul seems to assume that these things are no longer binding on Christians. They should no longer feel disqualified from belonging to the true people of God because they do not keep these laws related to food laws, religious festivals, new moons and celebrations, and Sabbaths because these things functioned as temporary shadows that pointed to a greater reality.

Now that the reality is here they do not need to go back to those things as binding on God's people. Paul is also convinced that the law requires obedience. It is based on the principle of doing the law, of actually performing it.

And Paul's argument seems to be that no one can keep it perfectly. If one wants to go back under the law, it operates according to the principle of obedience. And therefore, the law requires obedience.

The problem is that because of disobedience, anyone who submits to the law stands under a curse. Galatians chapter 3 and verse 10. For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse.

As it is written, cursed is anyone who does not continue to do everything in the book of the law. Clearly, no one who relies on the law is justified before God because the righteous will live by faith. What I think Paul is suggesting and assuming is that anyone who wants to rely on the law for justification will ultimately find it a dead-end street.

Not only because it has been fulfilled in Christ but also because salvation historically, the era, and the time of the law's binding force as part of the Mosaic covenant are over. But also, because it requires work, it requires obedience. And I think his assumption here is that because of sin, no one offers the obedience that it requires.

Instead, they find themselves under a curse. All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. The assumption is, the reason is because they disobey it.

Because of sin, they cannot keep it. We find something similar in Romans 2:23-25. In Paul's indictment of humanity in this chapter, he suggests the Jews also stand guilty despite having the law because they fail to keep it.

Now, one other feature to bring into this that we don't have a lot of time to go into is those who would categorize themselves or look at Paul's letters from what is called the new perspective often see the law, Paul's primary attack on the law, I don't think that's the best word to call it an attack. But Paul's primary critique of the law is not primarily because of human attempts to rely on the law and failure to do so, or just because of salvation history, but because it played a temporary role, but because the law functioned as an identity marker. What Paul primarily has in mind is the law as that which excludes Gentiles, so that circumcision, Sabbath, and food laws are the things that mark God's people, the Jews, off from Gentiles.

And so what Paul is going after in Romans and Galatians is excluding Gentiles, that the Jews have too closely associated the promises of God and the promises of Abraham with the Mosaic law, which excludes Gentiles. So, if Gentiles want to participate in salvation, they must identify with Jews by taking upon themselves the Mosaic law. Now, there's certainly some truth to this. Certainly, we do find that part of Paul's problem in Galatians particularly is that the law separated Jews from Gentiles.

The Jews are excluding Gentiles by requiring the Mosaic law. But certainly, this is only part of the story. I think when we read Galatians and Romans, we find that Paul also critiques the law because the new age of salvation has now been fulfilled in Christ, but also because no one can keep it.

Galatians chapter 3, verse 12. The problem of sin means that if one wants to rely on the law, we find that no one can keep it to the extent necessary to participate in salvation. So I think overall, this painfully brief survey of this issue and some of these texts suggest that Paul and other New Testament authors I think, but particularly Paul, see the law as playing a temporary role in the outworking of God's salvation history and that, therefore the law's binding authority, the function of the law in the old era has now reached its goal and its fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ so that the law is no longer a binding authority over God's people.

So, Paul can say we're no longer under the law. Now again, that doesn't mean we're excused from any law or any obedience, but that the Mosaic law is no longer a binding authority and force as part of the old covenant salvation. Now, this still raises the question of what role the law, that is, the Mosaic law, plays in the life of God's people. Should we read the law of Moses and should we endeavor to follow it and obey it? Let me just make a couple of observations.

Again, there's so much that we could say about this, but first of all, the first thing to say is that we need to understand that the law does apply to us and the law is still, in a sense, the law still speaks to God's people, but only in light of how it has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. So, no part of the law applies to God's people except as it applies through the lens of how it has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. So now we find that, again, it's interesting when you read especially Paul's letters, but I think elsewhere, that the law gets fulfilled ultimately by living life under the power of the new covenant Holy Spirit and by following the example and teaching of Jesus Christ himself as our ultimate ethical norm.

In fact, as Paul says in Galatians chapter 6 and verse 2, we are now obligated to or we are now under the law of Christ. This is consistent with what we found Jesus saying, I think, even in Matthew chapter 5. Yes, the Mosaic law still applies to us, but now only in light of how it has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It applies to us; it has enduring validity when seen and interpreted in light and through the lens of Jesus Christ, bringing it to fulfillment.

But even then, once more, Paul is still convinced that the ultimate source of our obedience does not come by submitting ourselves to the Mosaic law, but the ultimate source of our obedience is living life under the power of the Holy Spirit that has been poured out on us in fulfillment of the new covenant and by following Jesus own teaching and examples. But second, it is interesting that Paul does quote a number of or at least allude to or seems to draw on a number of Old Testament passages from the Old Testament law, from the Mosaic law. A clear example of where Paul actually quotes a text is found in Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 2. In Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 2, Paul says, Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Honor your father and mother. And then Paul goes on and says, Which is the first commandment with a promise? And then, so that it may go well with you and you may enjoy a long life on earth. Again, Paul quotes from the Old Testament law, the Mosaic law.

Again, I don't want to go into detail as to how to interpret that, especially that phrase, so that it may go well with you and the earth. But the main point is, Paul still, after saying things like you're no longer under the law, he still feels free to quote a section of the Old Testament Mosaic law as apparently still instructive for, still binding on God's people. Other passages that may at least allude to or assume or draw from Old Testament text in the law of Moses would be Romans chapters 13 and 8 through 10 as one example.

Chapter 13, Let no debt remain outstanding except the debt to love one another for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and

whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command. Love your neighbor as yourself.

So, Paul seems to think that the Mosaic law or the command to love one another also carries with it and sums up the other command so that they're still responsible not to commit adultery, not to murder, not to steal, not to covet, but they will fulfill that if they keep the law that love your neighbor as yourself. First Corinthians chapter 5 and verses 10 and 11. We could point to other texts in Paul where he talks about or forbids adultery and sexual immorality, where Paul forbids stealing in Ephesians chapter 4 as perhaps assuming or drawing from the Old Testament law.

First Corinthians chapter 1 and verses 10 and 11. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy and an idolater or slanderer or drunker or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

Actually, a monograph by Brian Rossner on the use of the Old Testament in First Corinthians 5 through 7 demonstrates that Paul frequently draws on the instruction from the Old Testament law as the backdrop for his ethical exhortation to his readers in First Corinthians 5 through 7. So intriguingly, Paul seems to appeal at numerous points to the moral teaching of several Old Testament commandments. So, I think the way to look at it is for Paul the law and for New Testament authors, we might say the law does still function, by law, I mean the Mosaic law, does still function as a guide and to instruct God's people. It is a guide that instructs God's people as to God's character and what God requires of His people.

So, we often find that some of the moral teachings, I don't want to revert to the threefold, we can divide the law up into moral law, ceremonial law, and civil law, but certainly, we do find that throughout the law that moral teaching that now Paul takes up and incorporates into the law of Christ, Galatians chapter 1 and verse 2. So, to look at Galatians chapter 1 and verse 2 again, I'm sorry, Galatians chapter 6 and 1 and 2, Paul says, Brothers and Sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted, carry each other's burden, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ. So apparently, Paul says we're still responsible for the law of Christ, which I take is Paul's way of referring to Jesus' own examples, Jesus' teachings, and His instruction, but also how Jesus now brings the law to its fulfillment.

That would include some of the moral teachings and requirements from the Old Testament law that are now taken up and incorporated into Jesus Christ. Again, to me this is very different from suggesting that the entirety of the Mosaic law is binding on us in the form that we find in the Old Testament. But instead, we now ask, how has Christ brought it to fulfillment? And what does the law tell us? How does it function to continue to guide us and instruct us as to God's character and

what He requires of His people? One of the ways to do this, just as kind of a, and this isn't the only way to go about it, but I find helpful one of the ways to approach this is to ask of any law what seems to be the true intention of this law.

So, for example, when you go back and look at some of the laws of gleaning in the Old Testament, when we think of applying the Mosaic law to us, we can ask, what seems to be the true intention of this law? I look at the laws of gleaning that require the farmers not to harvest their crop up to the very edge of the field but to leave some of it. What was the purpose of that, or what was the intention? Since I'm not a farmer and since in our modern day most of the crops we plant are not edible anyway, at least in the form they grow, not fit for human consumption, and most Christian farmers I know harvest everything and they don't leave rows of corn, are they disobeying the Mosaic law? But when you ask what the true intention is, we find out that the intention of this was the way that the poor were to be fed. This is the way that the poor were to be provided for.

So, if that's the true intention, then I can ask, in what way then am I to carry this out? In what ways, then, am I to help the poor? In what ways am I to reach out to the poor? It's probably not going to be through; people just don't walk through fields and eat food off the corn stalks or whatever. So, I could ask, but in what ways am I responsible for helping the poor? What are some practical ways where I can actually provide food, shelter, and clothing for the poor? That seems to be the true intention of the law. So at least one thing is to ask what seems to be the intention of this law and then how I can fulfill that, how I can carry that out in light of how it gets fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

But ultimately, I think we find in Paul's letters that obedience to Christ and his commands is our moral guidance and living life under the power of the Holy Spirit. So, in Galatians chapter 5, a life lived under the Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of the law. Paul even says in Romans chapter 8 and verse 4 as well, in Romans 8 and verse 4 he says, in order that the righteous requirement of the law, the Mosaic law, might be fully met in us who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

In other words, as Paul is saying, when we live life under the guidance of the New Covenant Spirit and in obedience to Jesus Christ, living life under the Spirit actually fulfills the law. It's what the law intended and pointed to. And we fulfill it not in putting ourselves back under slavery to the law and under its authority, but by living life in the New Covenant Holy Spirit.

And it's by living life under the Holy Spirit that the law is fulfilled in us. But I take it then that in the New Testament, commands and imperatives are still necessary and needed to give us guidance to show us what that kind of life looks like.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his lecture series on New Testament Theology. This is

session 29, Christians and the Old Testament Law.