

# RCF

## Covenant Classes

### Session 6 - Biblical Law

#### I. Introduction

- A. Many view the laws of God as something that belongs to a past era. In a typical conversation with someone, laws from the Old Testament will be referred to such as those that do not allow two different types of seed to be planted in the same field or two different types of fiber to be woven into the same fabric. Another example is burning down a house when a mold problem cannot be cured. These statements are used as broad justifications to dismiss the entire Old Testament law as of no relevance for today.
- B. Without a proper understanding of the law of God and how it applies today, we will be taken in by these deceptive arguments and be tempted to dismiss God's holy law. This is a tragedy because the law has great weight and significance for both the past and today. A proper understanding of the law of God will give us the understanding of God's holy laws that He desires us to have as well as train us to use the law in proper ways so that we can better reveal the Truths of the Kingdom of God.
- C. In this Covenant Class, we will consider the various Old Testament and New Testament laws. We will consider how these laws were fulfilled by Jesus and how they still apply to us today. This should help us to understand the application God's law to our personal lives, within the context of the church, and how the law of God is also meant for the various authorities to use as a standard of justice.

#### II. The Four Types of Old Testament Laws

##### A. The Ceremonial Laws (Lev. 7:37-38; Heb. 9:1-7)

Ceremonial laws include all the laws that are related to Old Testament worship including these subcategories of laws:

- 1. **Laws of cleanliness**—include personal and ceremonial cleanliness intended to reveal to people how they had become unclean before the Lord because of their sin. These laws include such things as becoming unclean through the touching of blood or a dead body. These laws also included ceremonial washings, acts of purification from disease and the handling of infectious agents in living

environments (Numbers chapter 19; Lev. 12:1-8; 13:47-59; 14:1-57; 15:1-33; Deut. 23:9-14).

2. **Laws of atonement**—included the sacrificial practices that demonstrated the separation from God caused by sin and the need for a blood remedy (Ex. 30:11-16; Lev. 16:1-34; 2:1-16; 3:1-17; 4:1-35; 5:1-19; 22:17-33; Num. 28:1-15).
3. **Laws of remembrance**—the laws that require the observance and celebration of certain feasts and religious holidays to remember God and his intervention in their lives and history (Ex. 23:14-19; Lev. 23:4-44; 25:1-22; Num. 9:1-14; 28:16-29).
4. **Dietary laws**—laws that mandate certain foods and animals to be clean and consumable and other foods and animals to be unclean and unconsumable (Lev. 7:22-26; 11:1-47; 17:1-16).
5. **Laws of stewardship**—these laws gave direction for the proper use of the resources entrusted by God to man. The use of land and treatment of animals and servants are examples of the laws of stewardship. There are also various regulations regarding the use of money, lending, usury and wages. The Sabbath rest of the land as well as the Sabbath rest of people are in this category of the Law (Ex. 31:12-18; 35:1-3; Lev. 23:3; 25:23-55).

## **B. Judicial (criminal) laws (Lev. 20:1-27; 26:14-46; Num. 15:32-36; Deut. 17:9-11; Acts 23:3)**

These are the laws that give specific penalties for particular violations of the law. These laws reflect the seriousness of the violations according to the penalty that God prescribes for those violations. Some violations of the law required death while others allowed for some other form of punishment such as a fine or physical harm to the offender.

## **C. Moral laws (Ex. 20:1-17; 23:1-13; Lev. 18:1-30; Deut. 1-17).**

These are the laws of right and wrong. They reveal God's expectation of righteousness between God and man and between, man and man, and between man and the rest of creation. The Ten Commandments are a good example of the laws of righteousness.

## **D. Social Compact (civil) laws (Ruth 4:7-8; Jer. 32:8-12)**

These are the laws that govern the social environment of men. This category of law is not entirely described in the Scripture but there are principles set forth for these laws that are not to be violated. Selling land, marriage laws and employment laws are some examples of social compact laws.

### III. The Nature of the Law

A. In order to understand God's view of the Law, we must review what the Scripture has to say about the nature and characteristics of the Law.

1. Psalm 19:7 –The law is **perfect** reviving the soul.
2. Psalm 19:8 –The law is **right** and brings joy to the heart.
3. Psalm 119:18 –The law is full of **wonderful things**.
4. Psalm 119:96 –There is **no limit** to the law of God.
5. Matthew 5:18 –The law will **never disappear**.
6. Romans 7:12 –The law is **holy**.
7. Romans 7:14 –The law is **spiritual**.
8. Galatians 3:21 –The law **cannot bring righteousness**.
9. I Timothy 1:8-10–The law is good, and it is **made for lawbreakers**.
10. Hebrews 10:1-4 –The law is a **shadow of the good to come**.
11. I John 5:3 –The law is **not burdensome**.

B. All of these verses reveal to us that the Law is a reflection of the character and moral attributes of God. God holds the Law in high esteem, and we should also hold the Law in high esteem.

C. **The Nature of the Law** is not to set up a standard by which we can become righteous before God. Many people try to make obedience to the law a way of being a good person. No one becomes righteous by observing the law. Instead, the law gives us a glimpse of who God is and makes us aware of our sin. Once we become aware of sin, the law is meant to lead us to Christ (Rom. 3:20; 7:7; Gal. 3:24). After we have come to know Christ, the law guides us into the right ways of living and serving God.

#### D. The Ongoing Significance of the Old Testament Law

1. Jesus tells us that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, rather, He came to fulfill the Law (Matt. 5:17-20). Romans 10:4 reveals that Christ is the “end” of the Law. We are also told that it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for the least stroke of the pen to drop out of the Law (Luke 16:17). These verses reinforce the fact that the Law is still in effect at least

in some ways. It would be a terrible error to assume that we need not pay attention to the law.

2. We must understand what Jesus meant by saying that He came to fulfill the Law. It is in the fulfillment of the Law by Christ that we can understand the ongoing nature of the Old Testament written code. The Law relates differently to those who are in Christ than to those who are not in Christ. Furthermore, because Jesus fulfilled the Law and its requirements, men have been released from the outward observance of certain portions of the Law.

#### IV. **The Fulfillment of the Law by Jesus**

- A. If we consider each of the types of laws, we will discover that Jesus fulfilled each of these types of laws in a different way. That means that each type of Old Testament law has a specific application to us today based on the fulfillment of the law that Jesus provided.

**B. The Ceremonial Laws** all revealed the unclean condition of man in relation to the God. All five subcategories of ceremonial law are to be included in our understanding of the fulfillment of these laws by Jesus. The laws that called men to be clean before God could never be fully kept and fulfilled by men. There were periodic observances of a cleansing process that reminded people how unclean they were and gave them a ceremony to go through so that they could feel some relief from the guilt of having violated God's holy and perfect standards. However, the ceremonies, sacrifices and dietary restrictions did not satisfy the just demands of the law. The breaking of the law required death and blood from the offender.

1. **Jesus fulfilled the laws of cleanliness** by never committing sin as a human being. In his human condition, He was perfectly holy and clean. He also revealed that the true issue of being unclean was **not external cleansing**; it was an issue of a **corrupt heart**. Jesus fulfilled the laws of cleanliness by allowing His followers to be **cleansed by His blood** when they put faith in Him. Jesus offers the cleansing of the conscience from sin so that the inner man can be clean. The fulfillment of the laws of cleanliness mean that it would be an **offense against the cleansing Jesus offers** to continue to carry out these acts and believing they have some value in making us clean before God. Instead, we are to look to Christ to cleanse us from the corruption of the inner man by the washing of His blood through faith in Him. (2 Cor. 7:1; 2 Tim. 2:21; Heb. 9:14, 1 John 3:3).

2. **Jesus fulfilled the laws of atonement** by becoming the perfect sacrifice. The death and blood of animals could not take away the sins of a human being. Only an **innocent human** could make payment of the demands of the law. Jesus became the perfect sacrifice when He died on the cross as an innocent man. This single sacrifice in perfect innocence was the complete fulfillment of the law as it **demanded atonement for violations**. The sacrifice on the cross was **once for all**. Therefore, to continue to sacrifice animals or other offerings for the sin of man would not only not atone for sin, it would also be **an insult and disgrace to what Jesus accomplished** when He died on the cross (Col. 2:14; Heb. 7:27; 10:5-18).
  
3. **Jesus fulfilled the laws of remembrance** by becoming the supreme intervention of God. All of the feasts and religious observances honored God for **His intervention** in the affairs of the nation of Israel. These observances also pointed to the **great intervention** that would occur when the Messiah would come on behalf of God and **replace the old covenant**. The symbolism that is part of each of the acts of remembrance (i.e. the lamb at the Passover) all point to the ultimate coming of the Christ in God's supreme intervention in the affairs of man. This great intervention was not simply for the sake of the nation of Israel; rather, it was for all men everywhere throughout all time. Israel was used by God as the avenue through which the Messiah might come. Now that the Messiah, Jesus, has come, these **acts of remembrance must rightly be summed up in the coming of Christ**. The religious observances are no longer appropriate to celebrate because Jesus is the ultimate celebration of these prophetic remembrances. Jesus gave the church two observances of remembrance that remind us of what he has done; the **Lord's Supper and baptism in water**. These two observances do nothing in terms of righteousness with God but they do remind us of the supreme intervention of God through the redemption of Jesus Christ. These two New Testament observances of remembrance are fulfillment in terms of remembrance while the coming of Jesus the first time was the fulfillment of the prophetic statements of the religious observances that were part of the laws of remembrance.
  
4. **Jesus fulfilled the dietary laws** by revealing that nothing that we eat makes us unclean. The special dietary restrictions were **not there to make people more holy or healthier**. The dietary laws were in place so that people would be reminded that the world around them is an **unclean world** and there are things they must not partake in or they will be defiled. Jesus declared that **all foods**

**are clean** but what comes out of a man (his words, attitudes and actions) are what makes him unclean. The observance of dietary laws could never make anyone clean before the Lord. Instead, Jesus offered the **ability to be clean by repenting** of what comes out of us and allowing him to give us a new and clean nature, energized by the Holy Spirit, which wants to please God and do what he desires. **The dietary laws put the focus of man being unclean on the temporal world while Jesus put that focus on the spiritual and moral condition of man.** In declaring all foods clean and making himself to be the cleansing agent for the inner corruption of man, Jesus fulfilled the dietary laws. To continue to observe these laws would give the false impression that God is pleased with these outward expressions of cleanliness that really do nothing for the condition of the soul of man (Mark 7:19; Rom. 14:20; 1 Cor. 10:25; 1 Tim. 4:4).

5. **Jesus fulfilled the laws of stewardship** by giving us rest in Him. While it is still important for followers of Christ to be good stewards of what God has entrusted to us, the rules of stewardship were revealed by Christ to be for our benefit not for our restriction. The true Sabbath rest is found in Christ, not in resting one day per week or the Sabbath rest of the land (Heb. 4:1-3). Because we are to rule over creation and it is to serve us, we must still maintain a righteous attitude toward the stewardship of the resources God has given us. However, the laws of stewardship became a master for the Israelites. Jesus set us free from that condition as we find rest and righteous relationship toward creation in Him. We must take care that in striving to be righteous in stewardship, we do not fall short by joining ourselves with the abusers of creation for profit. We also must not join hands with the worshippers of creation that place the environment on an equal or superior level with humans (Rom. 1:22-25). In Christ we will be good stewards of all that God has entrusted to us. We will find rest in Jesus and administer His resources in His ways.

**C. The Judicial Laws** were the Old Testament code for imputing consequences for various violations. These laws revealed the necessary penalty for the just satisfaction of the law. The committing of adultery demanded the death penalty while the acts of an unrighteous neighbor demanded only a rebuke (Lev. 19:17; chapter 20). Jesus fulfilled the judicial laws by being the full payment demanded as a just fulfillment of the law. The death of Christ on the Cross means that the demand for punishment was made in full. In an eternal sense all the penalty of the law is completely satisfied in the sacrifice of Christ. That satisfaction of the penalty of the law is only imputed to an individual as that

person puts faith in Christ to be his Savior from the just penalty of the Law.

1. In faith Jesus has fulfilled the judicial laws completely. However, those who are not in a position of faith in Christ do not have the fulfillment of the judicial law. The penalties still apply to them.
2. The agent of instituting most of the judicial laws is the civil authorities (Rom. 13:4-5). It is wise and prudent for the civil authorities to implement the standards of the civil law against the lawbreaker. In the implementation of these standards, the lawbreaker will be deterred from continuing to break the law and so will others be deterred. Additionally, the lawbreaker will be made aware of his violation of the law and may reach out and seek God in the midst of his anguish for the penalty of the law.
3. When the adulterous woman was brought before Jesus for His condemnation of her, He refused to condemn her. He saw her heart repentance and offered His satisfaction of the law (“neither do I condemn you”). He also told the mob that they could only carry out the judicial law if they were without sin themselves. This was because they were not acting on behalf of the civil authorities; they had taken justice into their own hands. Jesus recognized the authority of the civil government in Pontius Pilate even though he was an unrighteous ruler (John 8:3-11; 19:11).

**D. The Moral Laws** were fulfilled by Jesus revealing a righteousness that was above the written code.

1. Jesus revealed that love of God and love of neighbor was the fulfillment of the law. The greatest act of love is to lay down your life for another (John 15:13). Jesus fulfilled the moral law by not breaking that law at any point and then moving to the higher standard of love. Finally, He revealed the highest form of love and then acted it out in complete fulfillment of the moral law when He laid down His life on the cross for lost man.
2. The written code of the Old Testament is a true reflection of the character and moral nature of God but it is not a complete reflection of those attributes of God. The true and complete reflection of the character and moral attributes of God are his identity of love (1 John 4:16). In love the moral law is fulfilled because love does no harm (Mt. 7:12; 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10; James 2:8; 1 John 5:3). God the Father sent Jesus to redeem lost man as an act of love, and Jesus lived a life of perfect love consummated by His great love for the Father and for man as He willingly died a death on the cross.
3. The Old Testament moral code is a lower standard of the moral law than is the law of love. If someone violates the law of love, then the written code rules in their lives. When a

follower of Christ lives by the law of loving God above all things and loving his neighbor as himself, he will always live by a higher standard than the written code and will, therefore, fulfill the moral written code. Jesus lived out the fulfillment of the moral code not simply by not violating the written moral law but also by living and acting in love at all times and in all places. Even the driving out of the merchants and moneychangers from the temple by Jesus must be seen as a supreme act of love. Jesus was attempting to lovingly correct those who had gone wayward. The best form of correction for those committing these egregious acts was to take a whip and drive them out (John 2:15).

4. The Ten Commandments is a good representation of the written moral code (Duet. 5:6-21). Someone might ask if these laws no longer apply since Jesus fulfilled the law. The moral code is written as a guide and school master to show us the way toward the higher law of love. If someone falls below the law of love, the written moral code applies to their actions. In love, Jesus said that instead of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, we are to love our enemy and pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:38-42). On a personal level, Jesus was calling us to a greater fulfillment of the law than the written code had revealed. Jesus was challenging His followers to live by the standard of love. In this sense, the written code is the bottom end of the law while the standard of love is the highest we can go.
5. The command of Jesus regarding embracing a personal standard of love does not mean that the moral law should be wiped out. The civil government should use the written moral law to set the standard of righteous and justice within the social environment. While the believer is called to love those who persecute him, the civil government is called to punish those who persecute the Christian. It is only "in Christ" that the higher standard of love can be administered. When someone violates the moral laws of God, they should be punished whether that violation is in civil society, the church, the family, or the place of employment.

**E. The Social Compact Laws** are based upon an ordered society that governs the social and legal structures of people. Again, the standard of love that Jesus established fulfilled the need to act righteously toward others in our social interactions. For the Christian, Jesus revealed that material possessions and wealth are not to be our determining factors in the administration of social compact laws. We are to consider the eternal implications of our dealings with other people. Jesus admonished believers to give of what they had freely

even when they were being taken advantage of. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles (Mt. 5:41). Christians are not to bring a law suit against other Christians (1 Cor. 6:1). Christians are to use their material wealth to bring people to Christ (Luke 16:9). All of these commands by Christ reveal the ways of God in regard to social compact laws. Some marriage and family related laws also fall into the category of social compact laws. Jesus spoke about the higher standard of divorce beyond the Law of Moses (Matt. 5:31-32). What the Lord was revealing is that His righteousness in social compact has to do with the eternal perspective in matters not simply the temporary benefit of making a good deal or a wise agreement. All moral compact laws will be measured in light of their eternal implications. Jesus did everything with eternity in mind. As followers of Christ, we are to use the same standards in social compact.

## **V. The Administration of Justice (Law and Grace)**

### **A. The Three Standards of Eternal Justice**

#### **1. Apart from the law:**

- a. People who have not been exposed to the written law of God will be judged apart from the knowledge and violation of the written law. This is true because God has written his law on the hearts of all men. God has also given people a conscience which convicts them of breaking the law written on their hearts (Rom 1:20; 2:12-16). This means that people who have never heard or read the written law are still without excuse in regard to observing the law.
- b. People judged apart from the law will be condemned based on the violation of the law written on their hearts. No one who is judged apart from the law will be considered righteous because those people have become lawbreakers of the law written on their hearts and they are guilty before God (Rom. 2:12; 5:13-14).
- c. It should also be noted that God does reveal Himself to people who have never heard or read the written law and have never heard about Jesus. The Lord gives such people enough revelation of Himself that people know to seek Him and put faith in Him. This faith is credited to them as righteousness (Rom. 2:14-16; Heb. Chapter 11).

#### **2. Under the law**

- a. Those who are under the law are people who have been exposed to the written code. These people may or may not recognize the written code as the law of God but they are accountable to the law whether they believe it is from God or not.
- b. Everyone judged under the law will be found to be a lawbreaker. Lawbreakers are rightly condemned to death in hell forever with no appeal (Matt. 25:41; John 1:17; 5:29; Rom. 2:12; 6:23; 2 Cor. 3:9).
- c. Those judged under the law have no avenue of receiving mercy. Some people think they are good people because they have not broken many of the laws of God. The pleas of mercy from these people will not be heard by the Lord on the Day of Judgment.

### 3. **Under Grace**

- a. Those people who are under grace have been judged righteous before God. The demand of the law for a blood penalty for lawbreakers was met by the innocent death of Jesus on the cross. Those who put faith in Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross will receive the grace of God for the forgiveness of sin. This means that faith is the avenue by which grace can be granted to the lawbreaker (Acts 15:11; 20:24, 32; Rom. 4:4-5; Eph. 1:7; 2:5,8; Heb. 9:22; 1 Pet. 1:10).
- b. Grace has many facets to it but in this case it is a gift of forgiveness and justification that God gives to us. God's mercy is extended to the believer as faith in Jesus opens the way for grace to come to the believer. Grace is an unmerited extension of God's mercy that redeems us from the penalty of the law.

## **B. Temporal justice**

- 1. God has also established his justice for the administration of the affairs of people while they live on earth. This justice comes through His delegated spheres of authority. Each of these spheres of authority has a responsibility to rightly administer the justice of God according to the law or grace.
- 2. The administration of justice comes through the law when someone breaks the laws of God or the righteous laws of man. The administration of justice comes through grace as a means of enabling people to fulfill the requirements of the law and to live by the law of love. Grace offers mercy while the law offers punishment.
- 3. It is the responsibility of all believers to live and act in faith so as to be a candidate for the grace of God and the extension of his mercy. As we walk in faith and extend mercy to others, we will also receive mercy.

4. Mercy is better than sacrifice (Hosea 6:6; Matt. 9:13). This means that the Lord wants us to walk in his enabling grace by faith and to extend and receive mercy rather than operating under the law and trying to sacrifice as a penalty for breaking the law.
5. Due process is an important aspect of temporal justice. The written code of the Bible requires that there be two witnesses before someone can be convicted as a lawbreaker (Duet. 17:6; Heb. 10:28). True justice not only looks for witnesses but it also goes through the difficult process of discovery of fact before conclusions are drawn. When there is a lack of due process, Christians often violate the written code in their zeal to enforce it against others.
6. The five courts of temporal justice:
  - a. **The individual** is charged with judging his own actions before God. Every person is given a conscience by the Lord—that conscience helps people administer the justice of God in their own lives. We must make sober judgments about ourselves in light of the law of God and then bring about righteous correction (Rom. 12:3). Christians should be the most self-correcting people on earth. We have the written word, the law written on our hearts, a conscience, and the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin.
  - b. **Parents** are charged with administering the justice of God in the family. The husband/father has the highest responsibility in family justice while the mother is next in line. The standards of the home are to reflect the justice of God in all matters. If there is failure in any area, it is the responsibility of the parents to bring in the justice of God. Parents will be held accountable before God for how they have administered the justice of God in their family. Parents have a special responsibility to raise children in the ways of the Lord and thereby develop a godly conscience in them that will guide them the rest of their lives (Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:1-4).
  - c. **The employer** is charged with administering the justice of God in the work place. This means the employer must demand the fair treatment of workers and the payment of fair wages. The employee is charged with being diligent in his work and service to the employer. When an employee is errant, the employer has the responsibility to enforce the justice of God in the place of employment. This will train the employees in their understanding of God, and His system of justice (Col. 3:22-4:1; 1 Pet. 2:18-22).
  - d. **The church** is charged with the administration of the justice of God within the corporate context of the church. Elders have the specific responsibility to carry out the justice of God in regard to public sins that disgrace the name of Jesus and the

reputation of the church (1 Tim. 1-7; 5:17-19; Tit. 1:5-9). The church is also charged with judging civil matters for those who are part of the church. The church does not judge civil matters for those outside the faith. If the church fails to administer God's justice within the fellowship of believers, the church will be ruled by a spirit of lawlessness and will be ineffective for the work of the Lord. This demands the need for church courts to function (1 Cor. 5:12; 6:6; Heb. 13:17). There is also a need for the church to uphold the standards of biblical justice to all other spheres of authority and attempt to influence those spheres to implement the justice system of God (Eph. 3:10).

- e. **The civil government** is charged with administering the justice of God in the realm of criminal codes and in civil matters that are not judged by the church. The civil government is the only sphere of authority with the "power of the sword," which is the death penalty (Rom. 13:4). When the civil government rightly administers the law of God, there will be peace and order in the land. When the government is lawless, the people will become more lawless (Prov. 29:2). The civil government is not to violate other spheres of authority in the administration of justice. All civil governments throughout history have tended to encroach upon the administration of justice and authority that rightly belongs to other spheres.

## VI. **Living Under Grace**

- A. It should be the desire of every believer to increasingly live under grace. As a part of the law and justice of God, grace is the only way we can please God in what we do. Many churches and individual believers seek to please God through the following of the law or by creating laws that go beyond the mandates of the Bible. These are forms of legalism. Legalism is a faith killer and does not bring about the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 3:6).
- B. If we rely on the law, we will be disheartened and discouraged. If we seek the grace of God, we will be energized and full of life. There was great controversy in the early church about whether Gentile believers would have to follow the laws of the Jews or if grace was sufficient as a means to live a godly life (Acts 15:1-35). The Scripture is clear that God comes down on the side of grace for living a godly life that fulfills the requirements of the law. Grace never falls below the law so when we violate the law, we are testifying that we are not living by grace.
- C. There is a constant pull of the law that takes us away from the grace of God (Gal. 3:1-5; James 1:13-15). The Galatian church began strong in the grace of God, but quickly fell into various practices of the written

law. As they tried to follow the law, they fell farther and farther from grace. We must fight the temptation to rely on law if we are to continue to live a full life of the grace of God.

**D.** Grace is not only a merciful gift of God through Jesus Christ, for salvation—it is also what gives us the ability to live according to God’s ways. Consider when grace is needed in order for Christians to live a godly life.

1. Grace gives us power to preach Christ—Acts 4:33
2. Grace gives us the ability to pray effectively—2 Cor. 9:14
3. Grace gives us the ability to believe—Acts 18:27
4. Grace gives encouragement and hope—2 Thes. 2:16
5. We need grace to do good works effectively—1 Cor. 15:10
6. Our hearts are strengthened by grace—Heb. 13:9
7. The gifts of the Spirit are given by grace—Rom. 12:6
8. We are good servants by grace—Eph. 3:7

**E.** Live a life filled with grace!