

Background Information

Though generally most Christians, and specifically Lutheran Christians don't talk about the "Law" very much, the "Law" is actually a very important Biblical and theological concept. If I could ask you what you think the "Law" that I am speaking about is, I would expect someone to say the Ten Commandments and that is true, but only partly true. The Ten Commandments are undoubtedly the most well-known part of the Law, but in actuality, the "Law" is the 613 laws referred to in the books of the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Old Testament alleged to be written by Moses. A quick glance will indicate that they cover a number of issues, many of which we break routinely.

The bulk of the Law is spread among the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, and then reiterated and added to in Deuteronomy. This includes:

- The Ten Commandments
- Moral laws - on murder, theft, honesty, adultery, etc.
- Social laws - on property, inheritance, marriage and divorce,
- Food laws - on what is clean and unclean, on cooking and storing food.
- Purity laws - on menstruation, seminal emissions, skin disease and mildew, etc.
- Feasts - the Day of Atonement, Passover, Feast of Tabernacles, Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Weeks etc.
- Sacrifices and offerings - the sin offering, burnt offering, whole offering, heave offering, Passover sacrifice, meal offering, wave offering, peace offering, drink offering, thank offering, dough offering, incense offering, red heifer, scapegoat, first fruits, etc.
- Instructions for the priesthood and the high priest including tithes.

- Instructions regarding the Tabernacle, and which were later applied to the Temple in Jerusalem, including those concerning the Holy of Holies containing the Ark of the Covenant (in which were the tablets of the law, Aaron's rod, the manna). Instructions and for the construction of various altars.
- Forward looking instructions for time when Israel would demand a king.

So you see, the “Law” is well more than the Ten Commandments.

Speaking of the Ten Commandments, which we will cover next week in one week, we have a tendency to gloss over them as just a list of rules or some kind of Christian tourist attraction in scripture. But these rules didn't come from a judge, or a congress, or even the Supreme Court. The Law laid out in Deuteronomy 5 is part of a greater thing – an agreement to be God's people. The idea is that God is offering a kind of agreement, often called a *covenant*. “You will be my people, and I will be your God,” God seems to be saying, “but as my people, you must live like this.” Did nation of Israel hold up their end of the deal? Not often, to be honest. But God's promise was always there, calling Israel back into relationship.

It's this idea of covenant that is the focus of this session. Now you may get hung up on the ancient nature of these laws or on the fact that God's covenant was originally limited to the Israelites. You may even argue, “Didn't Jesus free us from that law anyway?” Before I answer that, let's circle back to the idea of covenant, an agreement to honor God with godly living like Jesus did.

What you need to know

The Law provided groundwork for relationship. There were other kinds of laws too – ceremonial, hygienic – but the Ten Commandments focus on morality, which is at the heart of God's desire for us: a desire for us to live loving lives; a desire for God's people to stand out as a people set apart; a desire for God's people to live according to God's values. God called his chosen people, “A light to the Gentiles,” meaning that their

well-ordered godly life would be attractive to the rest of the world and the people of the world would be drawn to the one true God of Israel.

I think it would be easy to judge the Law as a list of do's and don'ts on a score card for which we can be punished. That would be inaccurate. Think of your household. Your family probably has rules. You have to complete your homework before the TV or game system can be turned on, or before texting your friends can begin. Maybe you have daily household duties like setting the table or clearing the table. Do your parents make these rules because they hate you and don't want to do the work themselves, or don't want you to have any fun? No! I have no doubt that your parents love you and know what is best for you to succeed and be safe. Household rules establish order and provide a sense of belonging and commitment to the rest of the family. They also shape you into a responsible and likeable person – character traits that will bode well for you in the years to come.

But, I am willing to bet that you have probably broken some of your household rules. When that happens, the proper response is to confess your mistake and ask for forgiveness. And when forgiveness is given, even if there is punishment in the form of some kind of consequence that you deserve, that is grace.

In the same way, God gave the Israelites the Law to bring order to their lives and so that they could live godly lives and bring honor and glory to God – which by the way, is the reason God created us in the first place. And in the same way household rules demonstrate a need for grace for us, the Law demonstrated the need for grace to the Israelites. Our inability to fulfill the law shows us where grace must take over. So our inability to comply with the Law, points us to our need of grace, and that need of grace rightly orients our life with God. God is god, and we are not. We are God's broken and sinful creation in need of God's grace. We should never forget that.

The Law gives us an opportunity to honor God with our lives. While as Christians, we can say we're no longer "under the Law," we are still called to follow the example of Jesus' life.

About the Lutheran Study Bible (LSB)

The introduction to Leviticus is found beginning on page 189 in the LSB; and the introduction to Deuteronomy is found beginning on page 302. Please read the article entitled "Background File," "What's the Story?" and "What's the Message." These articles can be found at the beginning of every book of the Bible and are very helpful in getting a basic understanding of each book's content.

Into the Story

Find the book of Leviticus and scan through the light blue headings. This will give you a very brief glance at the detail of the many laws, statutes, ordinances, and commandments (collectively known as the Law) that God gave to the Israelites through Moses. If one catches your interest, read it.

Find the book of Deuteronomy and scan through the light blue headings. These are speeches given by Moses to the Israelites on the importance of living faithfully and obediently in the covenant. If one catches your interest, read it.

Essay Questions

In 250 of your own words, briefly answer the three of the five questions below:

1. Read Deuteronomy 30:11-20 and in your own words explain this summary of the covenant God made with the Israelites – what is the purpose, the emphasis, the hoped for outcome.
2. There are some laws that exist in the Old Testament that we honestly ignore completely. They kept God's people safe and healthy in a day when there was not a great deal of scientific understanding. Read the following passages and come up with

justification for keeping the law then and for ignoring it now:

- a) Leviticus 10:6
 - b) Leviticus 11:7-8
 - c) Leviticus 11:9-10
 - d) Leviticus 19:19
3. In the following psalms, the psalmist wrote about his appreciation of the Law. Read them, and in your own words, try to explain what he means and why. Psalm 1:2; Psalm 119:97
 4. In Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus spoke about the Law. Read the annotations in the outside columns and then focusing on verse 20, in your own words, where does grace come into play.
 5. Paul referred to the Law a lot in his writings. Read the following passages and in your own words, tell me what Paul is saying:
 - a) Romans 6:14
 - b) Galatians 3:19-26

Email your answers back to Pastor Jesse by email at pastor@zionohio.org no later than next Sunday, October 25.