

Christian Morality: Jesus' Teaching on the Law

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What is the relationship between the law of God in the OT and the teaching of Jesus in the NT? This is an important practical question because in his teaching Jesus seemed to affirm some laws (e.g. 'you shall not steal') but abrogate others (e.g. 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'). So when we come to OT laws that Jesus did not explicitly discuss (e.g. the law on charging interest on loans or engaging in homosexual acts) how do we know whether he intended them to apply to Christians or not? The apostles took some of the laws to apply (e.g. the law on homosexual acts, Rom. 1:26–27 etc.), but how did they decide this, and what about all the other laws: did Jesus intend these to apply to his followers or not?

Answers to this question vary widely,¹ e.g.

- he intended all OT laws to apply (Christian Judaism)
- he intended only the moral and civil laws to apply (theonomy)
- he intended only the moral laws to apply (moral nomianism)
- he intended only laws he taught to apply (new covenant theology)
- he did not intend Christians to live by laws at all (antinomianism)

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The wide variety of answers creates a great deal of confusion, both among Christians, and in the Church's witness to the world.

My aim in this article is to try to resolve this confusion by re-examining how Jesus related his teaching to the OT, and bringing this together in a coherent and consistent way.

Status of the Law (Matthew 5:17–20)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his disciples:

¹⁷'Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to destroy but to fulfil. ¹⁸For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one

¹ See, e.g., Wayne G. Strickland (ed.), *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) [paperback edn, *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (1996)]; Jonathan Bayes and Christopher Bennett, 'The Christian and God's Law: Two Views', *Foundations*, No. 48, pp. 16–25 (2002); Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Leicester: IVP, 2004), Part 3.

small letter, not one little stroke, will by any means pass from the Law until all has taken place. ¹⁹Whoever therefore relaxes one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others [to do] so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does [them] and teaches [them] shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I say to you that, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.'

Here Jesus affirms the OT ('the Law' and 'the Prophets', 17). He says that the Law will stand (a) 'until heaven and earth pass away' (18a), and (b) 'until all has taken place' (18b). He concludes that disciples should practise and teach all the commandments, even the least of them (19). Disciples are to be more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees (20), both in this respect ('For...'; cf. 23:23), and as in the teaching that follows (21-48).

Commentators debate the timing of (b). However, if the 'all' is taken to refer to all the prophecies in the OT, the last of which to be fulfilled is the promise of 'a new heaven and a new earth' (Is. 65:17-25), then, as the construction of verse 18 requires, (b) is synchronous with (a).²

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Interpreting the Law: the Sabbath (Mark 2:23 – 3:6)

The Pharisees repeatedly criticized Jesus for breaking the Sabbath. Mark records two such occasions.³ The first was when the disciples plucked ears of corn from a field, rubbed the ears in their hands, and then ate the corn (2:23). This violated the Law as the Pharisees interpreted it (24).⁴

Jesus answered the Pharisees by pointing out that their interpretation of the Law was more restrictive than David's (25-26)⁵ and even the Law itself (Matt. 12:5).⁶ Jesus went on to say to them:

²⁷'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath: ²⁸so the Son of man is lord even of the Sabbath.'

Here, Jesus affirms the teaching of the Law that the Sabbath was given for the good of men and women, that they might have rest and be refreshed (27; cf. Exod. 23:12, Deut. 6:24). He infers from this that, as Son of man, he has the authority to decide what is appropriate on the Sabbath (28). This is, by implication, whatever will do a man or woman good.

Jesus made this explicit on a subsequent occasion, when he healed a man with a withered hand (3:1-6). The Pharisees regarded this as breaking the Sabbath because the disease was not life-threatening, and treatment could have been left until the next day.⁷ Jesus asked the

² Some commentators take (b) to refer to the death and resurrection of Jesus, but this greatly strains verse 18, and makes verse 19 apply for only three years.

³ For parallels, see Matt. 12:1-14, Luke 6:1-11. For other occasions, see Luke 13:10-17, 14:1-6; John 5:1-47, 7:21-24, 9:1-41.

⁴ *Mishnah Shabbath* 7.

⁵ See 1 Sam. 21:1-6 in relation to Lev. 24:5-9.

⁶ See Num. 28:9-10.

⁷ *Mishnah Yoma* 8.6.

Pharisees who were watching, '[Is it] lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?' (4).

Jesus thus interpreted the law of the Sabbath according to its *purpose*. He thereby established a principle which is helpful in the interpretation of other laws. For example, Deuteronomy 22:8a states, 'When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof'. Taken legalistically, this would mean that every type of house should have a parapet. The purpose of the parapet, however, was to make the flat roof of a house, on which people lived in summer, safe (8b). Thus, to fulfil the law, a householder need not necessarily build a parapet, but make his house safe

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according to the hazards *his* particular type of house can pose.

Jesus' teaching on the Sabbath has considerable implications for the Christian observance of it.⁸ The main one is that Christians do not have to keep it on a Saturday. The *purpose* of the law, that on every seventh day men and women might have rest and be refreshed, is fulfilled whichever day they keep.

Christian standards: higher still (Matthew 5:21–48)

Speaking to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus went on to explain further how their righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees (20):

²¹'You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not murder; and whoever murders shall be subject to judgment."²²But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be subject to judgment ...

²⁷You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery."²⁸But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman intending to lust after [her] has already committed adultery with her in his heart ...

³¹It was also said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce."³²But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on account of fornication, makes her commit adultery ...

³³Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not swear falsely, but pay to the Lord your oaths."³⁴But I say to you, do not swear at all ...³⁷But let your word be "Yes, yes", "No, no" ...

³⁸You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."³⁹But I say to you, do not resist evil ...

⁴³You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy."⁴⁴But I say to you, love your enemies'.

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⁸ A full discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.

Here Jesus takes a series of laws from the OT ('You have heard that it was said to those of old') and raises their standard ('But *I* say to you').⁹ Thus:

- he extends the law against murder (Exod. 20:13) to anger (21–26)¹⁰
- he extends the law against adultery (Exod. 20:14) to lust (27–30)
- he makes the law restricting divorce (Deut. 24:1) stricter (31–32)¹¹
- he takes the law designed to prevent lying (Num. 30:2) further (33–37)
- he takes the law designed to restrain retaliation (Lev. 24:19–20) further (38–42)
- he extends the command to love one's neighbour (Lev. 19:18) to enemies (43–48)¹²

We now reach a key point. Raising the standard of these laws has a different effect on different laws. In some cases, the new standard includes the old one (e.g. if anger is wrong, murder is still wrong). In other cases, the new standard does *not* include the old one (e.g. if all retaliation is wrong, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' is now wrong). In other words, in some cases the new standard *subsumes* the old one: in other cases it *replaces* it.

We can now understand how Jesus could abrogate laws and still say that he had not come to destroy them (17–20). The laws he abrogated he abrogated by *raising* them, not destroying them.

A further example: the food laws (Mark 7:1–23)

On one occasion the Pharisees criticized Jesus for allowing his disciples to break 'the tradition of the elders' and eat without ceremonially washing

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their hands (1–5).¹³ Jesus replied by pointing out how the Pharisees reject 'the commandment of God' for the sake of their tradition (6–13). He then turned to the crowd:

¹⁴'Hear me, everyone, and understand. ¹⁵There is nothing from outside a man that, entering into him, can defile him; but the things that come out of a man are what defile a man.'

The disciples could not understand this, and asked him to explain the parable (17). Jesus replied:¹⁴

⁹ *Egō de legō* is more naturally taken as adversative than explicative.

¹⁰ Note that Jesus is referring to *continuous* anger (*orgizomenos* not *orgistheis*), i.e. he wants disciples to deal with anger quickly (cf. 23–26, 18:15–17; Eph. 4:26–27).

¹¹ For a full exposition, see P.G. Nelson, *Jesus' Teaching on Divorce and Sexual Morality*, 2nd edn (Latheronwheel, Caithness: Whittles, 1996).

¹² The gloss ('and hate your enemy') summarizes the main thrust of OT teaching (Deut. 7:1–2, 23:3–6; Psa. 139:19–22, etc.). There was, however, a requirement to help an enemy *in extremis* (Exod. 23:4–5, Prov. 25:21–22).

¹³ This tradition was based on the law for priests (Exod. 30:17–21, Lev. 22:1–9) but went far beyond it.

¹⁸'Are you also without understanding? Do you not realize that whatever enters into a man from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹because it does not enter into his heart but into his stomach, and goes out into the sewer' (cleaning all foods).

He continued:

²⁰'What comes out of a man, this defiles a man. For from inside, out of the heart of men, come evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²¹covetings, evil-doings, deceit, indecency, envy, evil-speaking, pride, foolishness. ²³All these evil things come from inside and defile a man.'

Here, Mark understands Jesus to nullify, not only the tradition of hand-washing, but also the food laws of Leviticus 11 (19b). Jesus does this once again, not by destroying the Law, but by raising it. The food laws had a symbolic function: they provided a means by which the Israelites could show themselves to be God's people and distinguish themselves from other nations (Lev. 20:22–26). As such they were concerned only with *outward* purity. Jesus, however, wanted his disciples to have an *inward* purity (Matt. 5:8), and to distinguish themselves from other people by the good deeds that come from this (Matt. 5:13–16). Thus, it was by raising the OT's standard of purity that Jesus nullified the food laws (cf. Acts 10:1 – 11:18).¹⁵

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The apostles later realized that raising the OT's standard of purity nullified all the other laws designed to distinguish Jews from Gentiles, including circumcision (Acts 15:1–29, see below). OT writers had already begun to elevate the law on the latter by calling for circumcision of the heart (Deut. 10:16, Jer. 4:4).

The new commandment (John 13:34–35)

A further example of Jesus raising the standard of a law is the instruction he gave to his disciples on the night before his death:

³⁴'A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

This commandment is an enhanced version of 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. Jesus replaces 'as yourself' by 'as I have loved you' (cf. 15:12). Jesus is asking his disciples to love each other to a new standard (cf. 13:1–17, 15:12–14, 1 John 3:16–18).

Raising the standard of other laws

How far Jesus intended to raise the standard of laws he did not explicitly discuss can only be gauged from his treatment of the laws he did discuss. For example, he did not discuss the law

¹⁴ Following most commentators, I take the words in parenthesis to be Mark's, hence the following 'And he said' to resume the quotation (compare the unbroken quotation in Matt. 15:16–20).

¹⁵ Cf. Christian Stettler, 'Purity of heart in Jesus' teaching: Mark 7:14–23 par. as an expression of Jesus' *basileia* ethics', *JTS* 55 (2004), 467–502. I am grateful to a reviewer for drawing my attention to this paper.

prohibiting homosexual acts (Lev. 18:22). His treatment of adultery in Matthew 5:27–30, however, suggests that this law should be raised to include fostering a desire to commit such acts.¹⁶ Similarly, his discussion of, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy' (Matt. 5:43–48) suggests that the laws prohibiting Israelites from charging interest on loans to fellow Israelites (Exod. 22:25, Lev. 25:35–38, Deut. 23:19–20) should be extended to loans made to anyone (cf. Luke 6:34–35).¹⁷

However, this process must be undertaken carefully. We may raise

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standards for ourselves, but cannot impose them on others. If a fellow Christian is convinced that the standard of an OT law that Jesus did not discuss should be raised less or more, we have to respect this (cf. Rom. 14:1 – 15:7).

Raising the standard of OT wisdom: laying up treasure (Matthew 6:19–21)

Jesus also elevated OT wisdom. The book of Proverbs teaches the virtue of laying up 'treasure' and not dissipating it (15:6; 21:20). Jesus accepted the wisdom of this, but took it further. He told his disciples:

¹⁹'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'

What Jesus meant by 'lay up treasures in heaven' he explained on another occasion (Luke 12:13–34):

³³'Sell your possessions and give alms; provide for yourselves money bags that do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.'

He explained this further in the Parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1–13): 'treasure in the heavens' is the eternal hospitality of those we help (9).¹⁸

Not for everyone (Matthew 19:3–12)

When some Pharisees asked Jesus a testing question about divorce (3), he told them that there should be no divorce (4–6). The Pharisees then asked him why Moses allowed divorce (7), to which he replied, 'Moses allowed you to divorce your wives because of your hardness of heart' (8). He then pointed out, as in the Sermon on the Mount, that divorce leads to adultery (9).¹⁹

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¹⁶ For a full discussion, see Nelson, *Jesus' Teaching on Divorce and Sexual Morality*.

¹⁷ P.G. Nelson, 'Jesus' teaching on money', *Foundations*, No. 50, pp. 9–14 (2003).

¹⁸ Nelson, 'Jesus' teaching on money'.

¹⁹ For a full exposition, see Nelson, *Jesus' Teaching on Divorce and Sexual Morality*, Chap. 2.

The disciples' response to the strictness of Jesus' teaching is to say, 'If such is the case of a man with [his] wife, it is not good to marry' (10).²⁰ Jesus answers them,

¹¹'Not everyone receives this word, but [only those] to whom it has been given. ¹²For there are eunuchs who were born so from [their] mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive [it], let him receive [it].'

What Jesus is saying is that it is not possible for everyone to accept his teaching on divorce (11a). It can only be accepted by those 'to whom it has been given' (11b). What he means by this he goes on to explain by means of an illustration ('For...', 12).²¹ He points out that some men are born eunuchs (i.e. incapable of having children), some are made eunuchs by men (i.e. by surgery), and some make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (i.e. they exercise self-restraint in their relations with women). In the same way, he implies, some couples are born able to live together for life, some can be made to do this by human pressure (family or social), and some make themselves do it for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Jesus draws a clear distinction between the standards he sets for his followers (those who want to keep his commands for the sake of the kingdom of God) and the standards that can be achieved by others (who are only born able, or can be made, to keep *some* of his commands). He evidently intended that his very high standards should be for Christians, not for the world.

Civil law

Jesus said very little about the laws that should govern society. However, his answer in verse eight implies that he regarded something like the law of Moses to be appropriate for this purpose, allowing, as it does, for the hardness of men's hearts. He did, however, question the fitness of men to carry out some of its punishments (John 8:1-11).

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Jesus' attitude to Roman rule was: 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's' (Mark 12:13-17). He did, however, tell Pilate, 'You would have no authority over me at all if it was not given you from above' (John 19:11).

The apostles followed Jesus in teaching submission to governing authorities (Rom. 13:1-7, 1 Pet. 2:13-17), except when this entails disobedience to God (Acts 5:29). Paul taught Christians to leave all punishment to God (Rom. 12:17-21), but also that governing authorities are 'God's servants' to bring punishment on wrongdoers (Rom. 13:4).

The paucity of Jesus' teaching on civil law emphasizes the extent to which his primary concern was with personal conduct.

²⁰ Lit. 'If this is the cause', referring back to v. 3, 'Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for every cause?'

²¹ I depart from most commentators here. That Jesus is using an illustration is evident from the context. The disciples were concerned about marriage, not being a eunuch (10). At least one of them was married already (Matt. 8:14). Jesus presumably used the illustration because the three cases are particularly clear-cut for eunuchs.

Summary of the Law: love (Matthew 22:34–40)

When Jesus was in Jerusalem, a lawyer from the Pharisees asked him, 'Teacher, which [is] the great commandment in the Law?' (34–36). Jesus replied:

³⁷"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ³⁸This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹The second [is] like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.'

Here Jesus brings together two laws (Deut. 6:5, Lev. 19:18), in which the key word is *'āhēb* (Hebrew), *agapaō* (Greek). This describes the kind of love shown by the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) and by Jesus himself (John 15:13–14, 1 John 3:16–18). Jesus says that this kind of love sums up 'all the Law and the Prophets' (40).

Jesus is not seeking to *replace* 'all the Law and the Prophets' here: only to summarize them (40). The commandments in the Law still apply (Matt. 5:17–20, 19:16–22; Eph. 6:1–3), albeit in elevated form (Matt. 5:21–48). One cannot invoke 'love' to justify an action that contravenes the Law (1 John 5:2).

Another place where Jesus summarizes the Law is in the Sermon on the Mount: 'So whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets' (Matt. 7:12). This is a different way of saying, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself', and it confirms the practical nature of 'love'. The 'So' points back to the teaching he gave earlier in the Sermon.

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The new covenant (Matthew 26:27–29)

Matthew tells us that at the Last Supper Jesus took the cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to his disciples, saying:

²⁷'Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸for this is my blood of the [new] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'

Here Jesus takes up the prophecy of Jeremiah concerning a new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34). He anticipates his death on the following day, and declares that the blood he will shed will be for the forgiveness of sins (cf. Jer. 31:34b). Therefore, at one stroke, his death made redundant all the practices in the Law by which worshippers sought forgiveness of sins (Heb. 8:1 – 10:18). It did not, however, *destroy* them: it raised them (cf. Matt. 5:17–48). Under the new covenant, there is still a sanctuary, still a priesthood, still the shedding of blood: but the sanctuary is now in heaven (Heb. 8:1–2; 9:11, 24), the priesthood is eternal (5:1–10, 7:1–28), and the blood is effective (Acts 13:38–39, Heb. 9:1 – 10:18). The writer to the Hebrews likens the relationship between the old covenant and the new to that between a shadow and reality (10:1): there is a correspondence, but one is much better than the other (8:6).

New relationship with the Law (John 3:1–21)

When Nicodemus came to Jesus at night (1–2), Jesus said to him, 'unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God' (3). Nicodemus could not understand this (4), so Jesus explained, 'unless someone is born of water and [the] Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God' (5). Nicodemus says that he still cannot understand (9), to which Jesus replies that, as a teacher of the OT, this is something he should be able to understand (10).

This was because, in speaking about being born 'of water and the Spirit', Jesus was referring to God's promise in Ezekiel 36:25–27:

²⁵And I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your defilements, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you; yea I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart

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of flesh, ²⁷and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and keep and do my judgments.

In the Ezekiel passage God promises to wash his people from their sins (25) and to put his Spirit in them to enable them to keep his law (27). God had made similar promises earlier in Jeremiah 31:31–34:

³³I will put my law inside them, and write it on their hearts ... ³⁴I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

These prophecies speak of a new relationship with the Law. No longer will God's people have to try to keep the Law in their own strength: God will give them his Spirit to enable them to do it.

Jesus goes on to explain to Nicodemus how it is possible for him to be born 'of water and the Spirit':

¹⁴'And as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.'

Jesus was 'lifted up' on the cross (John 12:32–33) where he shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins. He was also 'taken up' into heaven (Acts 1:9–11), from where he sends the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33, 38–39). Because of this we may look up to him on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, and look up to him in heaven for the help of his Spirit (John 7:37–39, 15:1–8).

An important question is, how does the Holy Spirit 'write' God's law on our hearts (Jer. 31:33)? Does he do this without our being taught it, or do we still need instruction? Jesus answered this question when he commissioned his disciples: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [and] *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*' (Matt. 28:19–20). This teaching formed a key part of their ministry (Acts 2:42, Eph. 4:20–24, etc.).

Dispute over the Law: the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1–29)

When the first Gentiles became Christians, some Jewish Christians insisted that, to be saved, Gentiles had to be circumcised, and keep 'the law of Moses' (1, 5). To resolve this problem, the apostles and elders met in

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Jerusalem (6). They decided to tell the Gentiles:²²

²⁸'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: ²⁹that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.'

What the Judaizers were trying to do was to impose the Law as Moses had given it, not as Jesus had taught it. The former included laws that dealt only with outward purity, which Jesus made obsolete by requiring inward purity. The apostles resisted the Judaizers' demands, except in respect of Gentile practices that Jews found particularly offensive (29). When they say that they will not burden Gentile Christians with any other requirements, they must mean, 'beyond the teaching of Jesus' (Matt. 28:20).

Except for fornication, the practices the apostles forbade were not wrong in themselves (Mark 7:14–23).²³ The apostles judged them to be wrong because they upset others (1 Cor. 8, Rom. 14:1 – 15:13). Christians may need to curtail liberties today for the sake of others.

Paul's teaching on the Law

Despite the apostles' decree, some Judaizers continued to unsettle churches. Paul wrote several letters to tackle this problem.²⁴ In these he presented arguments about 'the Law' (*ho nomos*) designed to convince his opponents. Some of his arguments are difficult to interpret because of their in-house nature, and commentators differ widely in their understanding of them. An example is his statement, 'Christ [is the] end of [the] Law' (Rom. 10:4). Some commentators take 'end' (*tēlos*) to mean 'termination', others 'fulfilment', others 'goal'.

However, Paul's teaching can be read in a way that ties in closely with

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the teaching of Jesus. Thus, Paul insisted (as Jesus did to Nicodemus) that 'a man is not justified by works of [the] Law but through faith in Jesus Christ' (Gal. 2:16, 3:10–14; Rom.

²² I have followed the generally accepted text here [see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (United Bible Societies, 1971), 429–34].

²³ Jesus' teaching rendered 'all' foods clean (Mark 7:19b). The inclusion of fornication (Gk. *porneia*) is unexpected because Gentile Christians would learn that this is wrong from the teaching of Jesus (Mark 7:21). One early manuscript (*P*⁴⁵) omits it. If the apostles included it, they presumably did so because of the prevalence of fornication in Gentile society. They may also have been influenced by the laws foreigners were required to keep in Israel (Lev. 17–18).

²⁴ P.G. Nelson, *What is the Gospel?* (Latheronwheel, Caithness: Whittles, 1997), pp. 2–3.

3:9–26).²⁵ In this sense, Christians 'are not under [the] Law but under grace' (Rom. 6:14, Gal. 5:18). Under grace, however, they are still expected to be 'slaves to righteousness', and, by 'walking according to [the] Spirit', have 'the righteous requirement (*dikaiōma*) of the Law' fulfilled in them (Rom. 6:15 – 8:14, Gal. 5:13–26). This requirement (as Jesus had taught) excludes outward acts like circumcision (Rom. 2:25–29, Gal. 5:6 etc.), but includes commandments like 'You shall not commit adultery', 'You shall not murder', 'You shall not steal', and 'You shall not covet', which are 'summed up in this saying: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself"' (Rom. 13:8–10, Gal. 5:14). Christians are therefore (as Jesus had implied) 'under [the] law of Christ',²⁶ i.e. the Law as Christ taught it (1 Cor. 9:20–21, Gal. 6:2; cf. Matt. 7:21–27, 25:31–46).

Conclusion

Jesus' teaching on the Law provides a clear answer to the question, 'How does he want Christians to live?' He wants them, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to keep the laws in the OT, interpreted according to their purpose, and raised to the standard he set out in the Sermon on the Mount. This has the effect of extending some laws (e.g. 'You shall not murder') and replacing others by more demanding versions of them (e.g. the food laws). Paul's teaching can be interpreted in a way that is consistent with this.

I hope that this understanding of Jesus' teaching will go some way towards reconciling the different views set out in the introduction.

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²⁵ Lit. 'if not through faith of Christ Jesus', the sense of which is determined by what follows.

²⁶ Gk. *ennomos Christou*, lit. 'in law of Christ'. The Received Text has *Christō* ('to Christ').