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“Do We Really Need the Old Testament”

Matthew 5:17-20

Pastor Gary Hamrick

Many people today wonder, what’s the purpose of the Old Testament? The conclusion that most people come to is that it’s primarily about rules, regulations, rituals, bloodshed, wars, death, and disease. Many wrongly conclude that since we are now under the new covenant – the New Testament – there’s really not much of a need to read and study the Old Testament. This conclusion is one hundred percent wrong! In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, he said that he did not come to do away with the Law but to fulfil it. Pastor Gary’s message today will help us understand the Old Testament and its application for every Believer.

Historical Background

1. Pastor Gary said, “Jesus [pointed] out the importance of upholding, teaching, and doing what the Bible says. In particular, what the Old Testament says because [he was] referring to the Jewish Scriptures, the Tanakh, which is what we would call the Old Testament. ... [Jesus] was saying that the smallest detail of [God’s] Word will outlast the present heaven and earth. [He was also saying that not even the tiniest part of God’s Word] should be tampered with, and therefore, everything in God’s Word is intended to speak to us as God’s revelation to mankind.”
 - a. **Matthew 5:17-18** - *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”*
 - i. A jot is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. ¹
 - ii. One way to think of the meaning of the word tittle is to think of the combination of the words tiny and little. ²

¹ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G2503&t=NKJV>

² <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G2762&t=NKJV>

Three Divisions Of Old Testament Law

2. Ceremonial

- a. Ceremonial laws are no longer binding on Believers.
- b. God wanted to distinguish his people, the Israelites, from all other pagan nations and people groups.
 - i. Ceremonial laws included things like how to dress, how to cut hair, hygiene, feasts and festivals, ritual cleansing, worship practices, as well as other categories.
- c. Examples of ceremonial laws:
 - i. **Leviticus 19:27** - *"You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard."*
 - ii. **Leviticus 15:28-30** - *"But if she is cleansed of her discharge, then she shall count for herself seven days, and after that she shall be clean. And on the eighth day she shall take for herself two turtledoves or two young pigeons, and bring them to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the priest shall offer the one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, and the priest shall make atonement for her before the LORD for the discharge of her uncleanness."*
 - iii. **Leviticus 5:18-19** - *"And he shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish from the flock, with your valuation, as a trespass offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him regarding his ignorance in which he erred and did not know it, and it shall be forgiven him. It is a trespass offering; he has certainly trespassed against the LORD."*

3. Dietary

- a. Dietary laws are no longer binding on Believers.
 - b. God intended dietary laws to keep people healthy and to emphasize cleanliness.
 - c. God divided certain animals into clean and unclean categories.
 - i. The clean categories are called kosher - acceptable - by Jews today.
 - d. The dietary laws point to a greater cleansing we need and that's a cleansing of the heart.
 - e. Examples of dietary laws:
 - i. **Leviticus 11:1-3** - *"Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them, 'Speak to the children of Israel, saying, "These are the animals which you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth: Among the animals, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud - that you may eat." ' "*
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- ii. **Deuteronomy 14:8** - *“Also the swine is unclean for you, because it has cloven hooves, yet does not chew the cud; you shall not eat their flesh or touch their dead carcasses.”*
 - iii. **Leviticus 11:9-10** - *“These you may eat of all that are in the water: whatever in the water has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers - that you may eat. But all in the seas or in the rivers that do not have fins and scales, all that move in the water or any living thing which is in the water, they are an abomination to you.”*
4. Ceremonial and dietary laws were not only intended to distinguish between God’s people and pagan nations and people groups, they were intended to point to a great need, which was the cleansing of the heart.
- a. **Colossians 2:16-17** - *“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”*
5. Moral
- a. Moral laws are still binding for Believers, because we need to regulate the heart.
 - b. Moral laws that God gave are considered to be timeless, eternal, and universal because they are based on God’s character.
 - c. Pastor Gary said, “[God] doesn’t want his people to be living in a way that violates his character. ... [God] wants us to live our lives in such a way that we honor [his] character. So, when we live our lives in a way that dishonors his character, we are violating the moral code of God, which is why the moral code doesn’t expire. By the way, the moral code of the Bible became the basis for common law in America.”
 - d. Examples of the moral code include:
 - i. God is true, so that’s why the Bible instructs us to not tell lies.
 - ii. God is faithful, so that’s why the Bible instructs us to not commit adultery.
 - iii. God is the author of life, so that’s why the Bible instructs us to not commit murder.
 - iv. God is forgiving, so that’s why the Bible instructs us to forgive others.
 - v. God is loving, so that’s why the Bible instructs us to love others.
 - vi. God is just, so that’s why the Bible instructs us to be just with others.
 - vii. Common law in America was based on what the Declaration of Independence called “the laws of Nature and Nature’s God.”³
 - 1. This was a legal term that came out of Sir William Blackstone’s Commentaries on the Laws of England.⁴

³ <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

⁴ https://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/blackstone.asp

2. Blackstone defined the laws of nature as “The will of God for his creation as revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures.”
- e. It’s interesting to note that many Bibles have headers that say that murder and adultery are matters of the heart.
 - i. Murder – [Matthew 5:21-26](#)
 - ii. Adultery – [Matthew 5:27-30](#)
- f. Ceremonial laws and dietary laws were never able to fix the major issue, which was the heart.
- g. Pastor Gary said, “People in Jesus’ day... thought they could fix their heart themselves, and people still think that today. [All you need to do] is do certain things and act a certain way and perform a certain way, you can fix your heart. ... We have a heart problem and that’s why Jesus came.”

Three Purposes Of Old Testament Law

6. The purpose of the Old Testament is to explain what sin is.
 - a. No one needs to be told that some things are right, and some things are wrong because they are intuitive and instinctive, and there are some things that we need to learn.
 - i. [Romans 7:7](#) – *“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’ ”*
 - ii. [Matthew 5:21-26](#) – *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’⁵ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’⁶ shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.”*
7. The purpose of the Old Testament is to expose sin in us.
 - a. When we read the Bible, it cuts us open, in a manner of speaking, to expose

⁵ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G4469&t=NKJV>

⁶ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3474&t=NKJV>

sin in our heart.

- i. **Romans 3:20** - *“Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”*
 - b. A thermometer can’t provide any remedy or healing; it just reveals that you are sick, and so the law of God is similar in that it can’t fix our heart problem, but it can show us the reality that we have a sin problem.
8. The purpose of the Old Testament is to express our need for a Savior.
- a. **Galatians 3:23–25** - *“But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”*
 - b. **Jeremiah 17:9** - *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”*
 - c. **Romans 3:23** - *“[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*
 - d. Some people today read God’s Word or they hear God’s Word and they come to an understanding of what sin is when it’s explained to them; and many, who have self-awareness, realize that they are a sinner, but the problem is if they aren’t moved toward a Savior, they will try harder to be a good person who does a lot of good and charitable things.
 - i. “Being good and/or doing good things” never has been nor will it ever be the answer to our common heart problem.
 - ii. “Being good and/or doing good things” can be a problem in that it often leads to self-righteousness, and that won’t fix a heart problem.
 - e. **Matthew 5:20** - *“For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”*
 - i. The Pharisees were considered to be the most righteous people by any standard.
 - ii. There’s no doubt that Jesus’ hearers must have wondered how they could be more righteous than the Pharisees, and that was because they were thinking about his remarks in terms of making themselves righteous by what they did and how they behaved.

The Great Exchange

9. **2 Corinthians 5:21** - *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*
10. God placed our sin upon Jesus, and then God imputed Jesus’ righteousness to us, which is a gift of God that is freely offered to all who believe by child-like faith.
- a. **Ephesians 2:8–10** - *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and*

that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

- b. **Matthew 18:3** - “[Jesus] said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.’ ”
11. **Philippians 3:8-9** - “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.”
 12. **Psalms 51:10** - “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Matthew 5:17-20** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s remarks and the related Scriptures for each of the divisions of the Old Testament. (See #2 through #4 above)
3. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s comments about the moral law of God. (See #5 above)
4. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary’s outline regarding the purposes for Old Testament law. (See #6 through #8 above)
 - a. Read the Scriptures Pastor Gary shared in each of the three points of his outline.
5. Read and discuss the Scriptures Pastor Gary shared concerning what he calls The Great Exchange. (See #9 through #12 above)
6. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)