

Study Guide #15: God's Laws

Introduction

The Law of God can be organized into 4 major component parts: (1) Moral Law; (2) Civil Law; (3) Ceremonial Law; and (4) Health Law. In this Study Guide, we examine the Civil, Ceremonial, and Health Law. Then in Explorer II, Study Guides #16 and #17, we discuss the Moral Law.

Question #1: Why isn't ancient Israel's Civil Law still valid for Christians?

Answer: The Torah—the 1st 5 books of the Old Testament—provides for several civil laws, most of which are specific applications and penalties for violations of the Moral Law of the Ten Commandments. Some believers have questioned that if the Moral Law is still valid, why the civil penalties for violating it are not also still valid. But the reason for civil penalties for violations of God's Moral Law was that ancient Israel began as a *theocracy*, which comes from the Greek for "rule by God." By contrast, the Christian Church is a *spiritual* nation (1 Peter 2:9) whose citizens are scattered all over the world. By nature, civil laws are *political* in nature. Therefore, since God no longer has a theocracy, the Civil Law given to Israel no longer applies. Thus, there's no conflict between maintaining the validity of the Moral Law and denying the continued validity of the Civil Law. [NOTE: Of course, many modern Christians don't think the Moral Law as such is valid for Christians unless repeated individually in the New Testament. We discuss this issue in Explorer II, Study Guide #16.]



Ten Commandments

Question #2: What is the Ceremonial Law?

Answer: The Ceremonial Law describes laws which proscribe specific religious ceremonies to be performed. They are sometimes divided into 2 kinds: (a) Typical and (b) Untypical. Typical ceremonial laws are those that have types that represent a future entity, event, or experience in relation to God's people. Typical ceremonial laws, therefore, are types that are eventually fulfilled by a later person, event, or experience (called the anti-type)—such as Adam being a type of Jesus in Romans 5:14. Typology is the study of types in the Scriptures. Untypical ceremonial laws concern religious ceremonies that are not typical in nature. The law of circumcision and the various Old Testament rituals to rid a person of ritual uncleanness are examples of untypical ceremonial laws.

Question #3: What is an example of a Typical Ceremonial Law?

Answer: The best and largest example of Typical Ceremonial Law are the laws for the ancient sanctuary system. In fact, when most Christians think of the Ceremonial Law, that's what they think of. Jesus is

called **“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29, NKJV). See also I Peter 1:19 and Revelation 5:6-14. That means that all of the sacrificial animals in the Old Testament sanctuary system were types of Jesus. Therefore, when type met antitype in the events surrounding the death of Jesus, the types were no longer necessary, and they faded away as shadows faded in the bright sunlight.

This view is reinforced by the fact that the veil in the Jerusalem Temple between the Holy and Most Holy Place was torn from top to bottom (supernaturally) when Jesus died (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; cf. Luke 23:45), thus indicating that Jesus’ death resulted in His followers having *unrestricted* access into the *heavenly* sanctuary (Hebrews 10:19-20). This made the earthly Temple unnecessary since it was merely **“the copy and shadow of the heavenly things”** (Hebrews 8:5, NKJV) and **“not the true tabernacle, which the Lord erected, and not man”** (Hebrews 8:2, NKJV). This is the reason the book of Hebrews explicitly teaches that the law of the priesthood was annulled (Hebrews 7:12, 16, 18-19, 28), because it made nothing perfect (Hebrews 7:19) since it was administered by imperfect priests (Hebrews 7:11-12, 23-28). Moreover, its animal sacrifices could not perfect, or save, anyone either because they were constantly repeated (Hebrews 10:1-4, 11). Therefore, it’s quite clear that the Law concerning the earthly priesthood, earthly sanctuary, and animal sacrifices was abolished by the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God, and that the entire Ceremonial Law was originally intended to be only *temporary* until Jesus fulfilled its typical ceremonies. [NOTE: This truth about the earthly sanctuary has much to tell us about any supposed future rebuilding of a Third Temple in modern Israel.]



Old Testament Tabernacle

Question #4: Are the annual Jewish festivals also part of the Ceremonial Law?

Answer: Yes, because the 7 annual Hebrew festivals are ceremonies in which future events or experiences involving God’s people would occur. The Spring festivals—Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, and Pentecost—typified events associated with the 1st coming of Jesus. And the Fall festivals—Trumpets, Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), and Tabernacles—typified events or experiences associated with those near and after the 2nd Coming of Jesus. The evidence for these truths is outlined below:

Passover—typifies the death of Jesus as the Lamb of God, according to John 1:29, 36; I Corinthians 5:7; I Peter 1:19; Hebrews 7:27; 9:28; 10:10, 12; and Revelation 5:8-9, 12. In His death, Jesus made it possible for those who trust in Him to be delivered from the bondage to sin, as typified by Egyptian bondage (Romans 6:7, 11-14, 17-19), and to eventually enter the heavenly Canaan, as typified by the earthly Canaan (Hebrews 11:16, 22-23). Note that Jesus died on Passover (Matthew 26:17-27:50; Mark 14:12-15:37; Luke 22:7-23:46; John 13:1-19:30).

Unleavened Bread—illustrates the fact that the believer is to live apart from willful sin, for Paul used Passover language to indicate that the leaven associated with this festival represented **“malice and wickedness”** (I Corinthians 5:7-8, NKJV). The fact that this feast immediately followed Passover reflects the Christian understanding that Christ’s death made it possible for the believer to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-11). We are saved first; then we act like it by walking with Jesus.

Firstfruits—represent Jesus as the “firstfruits” of the resurrection (I Corinthians 15:22-23), which means that His resurrection was the guarantee that the dead in Him will be raised at His 2nd Coming (I Thessalonians 4:16-17). Firstfruits occurred 2 days after Passover (Leviticus 23:5-7, 11). Note that Jesus was resurrected on the Feast of the Firstfruits, 2 days after Passover (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 15:42-16:6; Luke 23:50-24:6; John 19:38-20:17).

Pentecost—Jewish tradition says this feast celebrated the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. The word “Pentecost” means “50th,” and the feast came 50 days after the Firstfruits (reckoned inclusively, that is, *counting* the day of Firstfruits, Leviticus 23:15-16). The very 1st Pentecost after Jesus’ resurrection saw the Church being inaugurated (Acts 2)—just as literal Israel was inaugurated as a nation at the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai.

Trumpets—According to Leviticus 23:23-32, the Feast of Trumpets seems to have been an announcement to prepare for the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) that was coming in 10 days. Trumpets are also associated with the 2nd Coming of Jesus (Matthew 24:31; I Thessalonians 4:16-17). All this data suggests that Trumpets typified God’s end-time Church that will proclaim the gospel in the context of a warning against spiritual Babylon and the soon return of Jesus in glory (Revelation 14:6-11), as typified by the harvest of Revelation 14:14-20.

Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)—This was a solemn day of cleansing and judgment that occurred on 1 day in the fall each year. According to Leviticus 16 and 23, the sins of the Israelites had accumulated symbolically in the sanctuary during the year by the transferring of some of the sacrificial animals’ blood to the Holy Place of that sanctuary. On the annual Day of Atonement, the sanctuary itself was symbolically cleansed of all those forgiven sins. Those who had not participated in the sanctuary services, or who had not prepared themselves for the Day of Atonement by fasting, were cast out (or executed) of the camp of Israel, no longer to be a part of the covenant community of God. This service strongly suggests that it typified an end-time day of judgment in which all those who claim to belong to God (as the ancient Israelites did, not their pagan nation-neighbors) would be judged as to whether they had in fact demonstrated their faithfulness to who they claimed to be.



Tabernacles—This is also called the Feast of Ingathering because the ingathering of the fruit and olive crops had just been completed at this fall time of the year. This typifies the ingathering of the fruit of God’s people’s labors in proclaiming the gospel because Zechariah 14:16-19 describes the gathering of those survivors among the nations that had been destroyed in judgment (vv. 3-15) as a gathering together to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles in God’s millennial kingdom. Therefore, this feast typifies the experience of all of God’s people in Christ’s literal kingdom.

Question #5: Should Christians keep the annual Jewish festivals?

Answer: A few Christians advocate the keeping of these festivals, usually on 3 major grounds: (1) The apostle Paul apparently kept them, for he mentions celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles (Acts 20:16; cf. I Corinthians 16:8); (2) the Christian Church is spiritual Israel, suggesting a continuity with the nation of

Israel; and (3) the annual festivals have significant meaning for Christians. While these are factual statements, we don't believe that Christians *must* observe these festivals for several reasons. *First*, they were instituted and given to the nation of Israel and specifically reflect their history and their agricultural seasons in the context of their earthly sanctuary system. *Second*, there is both continuity and *discontinuity* between Israel and the Church. The Christian Church is a *spiritual* nation rather than a *political* nation (II Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6, 9). Physical circumcision is no longer the sign of the covenant relationship with God (Acts 15; I Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 5:6; 6:15). The Christian sanctuary that counts is the one in heaven (Hebrews 7:11-10:25). *Third*, the Jerusalem that Christians identify with is the *New*, or heavenly, Jerusalem, not the one on earth (Hebrews 12:22-23; Revelation 3:12; 21:2). By contrast, the annual festivals focused most of their celebrations on the *earthly* sanctuary in old *Jerusalem*, with its *earthly* priesthood and animal sacrifices. These contrasts strongly suggest that believers don't necessarily identify with literal Israel's annual festivals. *Fourth*, Paul probably did keep the festivals, in a Christian way of course. But remember that Paul said **“to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law”** (I Corinthians 9:20, NKJV). Therefore, Paul's observance of the festivals doesn't automatically constitute a requirement for all Christians. *Fifth*, Christians are scattered all over the earth, which would make travel to Jerusalem 3 times a year as required for all males unaffordable and impractical for most believers (Exodus 23:14-17; 34:18-23; Deuteronomy 16:16). Furthermore, those living in the southern hemisphere experience the seasons in very different months from those in the northern hemisphere (like modern Israel). This means there would be no way for the Church to observe the festivals in the Biblical manner and at the same time. In this way, we know that the festivals were intended for the nation of Israel. *Finally*, the Holy Communion service serves as a pattern by which to evaluate the validity of *all* of the annual festivals. See Explorer II, Study Guide #11 for evidence that the Communion service is a replacement for the Jewish Passover. We also learned in that Study Guide that there's no set time or number of times in which to celebrate the Communion service. From these facts we can deduce that the New Testament doesn't mandate an annual celebration of the Lord's death or of His resurrection. And if Passover isn't required for Christians, then how could any of the other festivals be required? For all these reasons, we conclude that Christians are not required to observe the annual festivals.



Question #6: What is circumcision, and why isn't it required for Christians?


Answer: Circumcision is the surgical removal of the foreskin on the male sex organ. God first commanded it to Abraham as a sign of the covenant with him and for all his male descendants at the age of 8 days (Genesis 17:1-14). It was the symbol that reminded people they also needed to be *spiritually* circumcised (Deuteronomy 10:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 2:28-29). The law of circumcision is an example of an untypical ceremonial law. In the New Testament, water baptism is the symbol that a believer has formally entered into a covenant relationship with God (Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:11-13). This indicates a change in the symbols of the covenant.

Question #7: Are there any other examples of *untypical* Ceremonial laws?

Answer: Yes. These would be laws concerning ritual cleansing ceremonies when a person became defiled by contact with the carcass of an animal or the corpse of a person (Leviticus 11:24-40; Numbers 19:11-22), bodily emissions from sex organs (Leviticus 15), and by acquiring skin diseases or contacting a leper (Leviticus 13-14). In Leviticus 10:10, cleanness is associated with holiness, and uncleanness with defilement. Therefore, the Lord gave Israel all these regulations in order to emphasize the distinction between what is holy and that which is unholy. If physical circumcision, designed to teach the need for spiritual cleansing, is no longer required, then how could purely ritual cleansing ceremonies still be valid? In any case, the sacrificial system, often associated with these rituals, has been abolished at the cross.

Question #8: What is the Health Law concerning clean and unclean meat?

Answer: Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 contain the Health Law concerning clean and unclean meat. Its major features are outlined below:

- **Land Animals**—To be clean (edible), an animal must have both (1) a split hoof and (2) chew the cud. This includes cows, sheep, goats, deer, etc. [NOTE: The pig is especially pointed out as *unclean*.]

Pigs
 - **Water Creatures**—To be clean, a water creature (both sea & fresh water) must have both (1) fins and (2) scales. This includes most fish, except for catfish. Unclean water creatures include all shellfish, such as shrimp, oysters, clams, lobster, etc., as well as mammals (like whales, dolphins, sea lions, otters, etc.).
 - **Fowl**—There is no rule for these, but the long list of unclean fowl indicates that the unclean ones are all scavengers. Clean fowl would include chicken, turkey, quail, etc.
- **Insects and Creeping Things**—To be clean, an insect must have jointed legs above their feet, allowing them to leap (Leviticus 11:20-23). This includes locusts, crickets, and grasshoppers. All non-flying creatures that creep or crawl on the earth are unclean. This includes moles, mice, lizards, geckos, chameleons, worms, and snakes (Leviticus 11:29-31, 41-43). [NOTE: It's interesting to note that Isaiah 66:17 compares swine's flesh to mice and calls both an abomination.]

[NOTE: Eating the fat and the blood of even a clean animal was also prohibited, according to Leviticus 3:17; 7:23-25 (fat) and Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 3:17; 7:26; 17:10-16; 19:26; and Deuteronomy 12:23 (blood).]

Question #9: Are Christians required to observe the Health Law concerning clean and unclean meat?

Answer: Most Christians say “No” to that question. But if we take our own personal taste buds out of the picture and look at it objectively, we discover a different answer. *First*, the Health Law doesn't typify anything, so it's difficult to see how it could have been nailed to the cross. *Second*, it's evident that Noah, who lived long before Israel existed, knew about the distinction between clean and unclean animals

(Genesis 7:2) and the prohibition against eating blood (Genesis 9:4), even though the other specifics aren't spelled out in that part of the Scriptures. Thus, it appears that the Health Law was not given *only* to ancient Israel. *Third*, the Bible expresses concern for people's physical health needs as well as their spiritual health because the physical body of a believer is **"the temple of the Holy Spirit"** (I Corinthians 6:19-20, NKJV). Romans 12:1 calls for believers to **"present [their] bodies a living sacrifice to God"** (NKJV). Since Jews and Gentiles have the same physical constitution, it's self-evident that any health laws would apply to everyone. *Finally*, modern medical science has established that the creatures the Bible calls unclean contain dangerous levels of toxins to humans—again indicating that the Health Law was given to mankind in general, not to Israel alone. Could it be that God actually knows what He's talking about in His Law?

Question #10: But wasn't the Health Law given to keep the Israelites separate from their pagan neighbors?

Answer: Many Christian scholars argue that the distinction between clean and unclean meat was given to ancient Israel only to prevent them from socializing with their pagan neighbors, thus being led spiritually astray—the idea being that mealtimes are the symbol of socializing with other people. Thus, if the Israelites didn't eat with their pagan neighbors, they wouldn't get close enough to become spiritually affected. However, that thesis has 3 major defects. *First*, as just noted in the previous question, the distinction between clean and unclean animals was known by God's people before the Flood, long before there was an Israelite or a Jew. *Second*, there's no evidence in Scripture that God prohibited certain dietary practices *only* as a means to keep the Israelites separate from their pagan neighbors. Wouldn't it be more logical to believe that He did this for their physical health, and that the *natural result* would be to keep the Israelites separate from their pagan neighbors? *Finally*, medical science suggests that there is a physical health benefit to following God's Health Law, whether you are Jew or Gentile.



Meat Platter

Question #11: Wasn't the Health Law originally intended to distinguish between animals fit and unfit to be used as sacrifices under the old covenant?

Answer: The idea behind this question is that now that the animal sacrificial system has been abolished, Christians may now eat anything they want to. However, Leviticus 22:20-25 prohibited the sacrificial offering of animals which had physical defects, sores, scabs, and blindness, summarized in verse 25 as **"corruption"** and **"defects"** (NKJV). Note that sacrificial animals were also called **"the bread of your God"** (NKJV). No Hebrew would sacrifice an unclean animal, so this is talking about animals that would otherwise have been clean. This means that unclean animals were considered *permanently diseased*. And the fact that sacrificial animals were in a symbolic way the **"bread"** (food) of God means that diseased animals were unacceptable as God's food and therefore unacceptable to people as food. Therefore, the issue of clean and unclean animals pertained to what is eligible for food and what is not. Since the digestive systems of Jews and Gentiles are identical, the distinction between clean and unclean meat would apply to all people and even when there is no sacrificial system. [NOTE: For a discussion of New Testament passages that Christians usually cite as proof that the distinction between clean and unclean meat is no longer valid, please see Explorer II, Study Guide #20.]