

A Reformed View of Law

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1. No man can live without law. It is never a question of law versus no law or of God's Law versus no law, but always a battle between God's Law and the different laws of peoples, religions and ideologies.
2. The question is not, therefore, whether someone wants to submit to a law or not, but only which law is binding for him: "the standards of the nations" or the Law of God (Ez 11:12; see Jer 10:3-8; Lev 18:3-5). This continues also to be valid for Christians, who should not derive their standards from other religions, other cultures or from their environment, but from God and his Law alone.
3. The centrality of ethics for the definition and essence of a religion can be demonstrated by several languages in which the word for what we today call "religion" was the same word as for "law". The meaning of the term "religion" in its modern sense is the result of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. In the Middle Ages and before, the term *lex* ("law") was used more often than any other term to give a common name to the different religions.
4. God's rules are rooted in God's character. Therefore God's characteristics, as depicted in the Old and NT, correspond with God's Law and the word of God. Although God alone is "holy" (Rev 15:4), "good" (Mark 10:18) and "righteous" (2 Chr 12:6; Ps 11:7), "the Law" is also "holy, righteous and good" (Romans 7:12), because it stems from the mouth of God.
5. No view of biblical Law can be valid in which the Law is not fully seen as the very Word of God equal to any other part of the Bible. The Law is no lower part of the Bible.
6. Antisemitism is only possible where the OT, especially OT Law, has been put aside. A love for the OT and its Law is the best protection against Antisemitism.
7. Did Jesus replace the Law by love? Was the cruel OT replaced by the loving NT? How could this be possible since the central command of the NT, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself", is an OT quotation? For Paul the Decalogue and "every

commandment” is governed by love (Rom 13:8-10) and only states what love will do. One who really loves will never steal, murder, covet or commit adultery! If Christians do not return to this rationale and motivation for the whole Law they will continue to apologise for the Law of God.

8. Jesus always used the OT to refute the Pharisees. He again and again rebuked the Pharisees and scribes for misinterpreting, misusing and rejecting the OT and its Law. This can be seen especially in Mk 7:1-5 (Mt 15:1-13) and Mt 23:23. “You have a fine way to set aside the commandments of God in order to observe your own traditions” (Mk 7:9).

9. The same can be found in the Sermon on the Mount. The list of subjects each beginning with “You have heard it said ... But I say unto you ...” (Mt 5:21-48) is introduced by a clear statement that Jesus came to fulfill the Law better than the Pharisees did (Mt 5:17). He came to establish even “the least of these commandments” (Mt 5:19, read Mt 5:17-20). When Jesus tells His hearers, for example, “Whosoever looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt 5:28), he does not invent a new concept of inner sin against an outward orientation of the OT, but reminds his hearers that the Decalogue not only contains the seventh commandment, but also the tenth (Ex 20:17; Dtn 5:21).

10. Without the Law, there would be no sin (Rom 4:15; Rom 5:13; Rom 7:8; 1 Cor 15:56). Therefore, the role of the Law is to reveal sin (Rom 3:20; 7:7,9-10; Gal 2:19). Thus it becomes clear that violating the Law is a clear-cut fact independent of any personal feelings or emotions. God asks us to do only what He commands us to do in his revelation. Only those things are forbidden, which are forbidden by the Law of God (Dtn 10:12-14). Whoever goes beyond what God has defined as sin, declares himself to be a legislator equal to God (Jam 4:12) and at the same time makes the law a human-made unbearable yoke (Mt 23:4; Acts 15:10).

11. The heathen are “without the law” (Rom 2:12); they are the “Gentiles who do not have the law” (Rom 2:14). If instead a so-called natural law takes the place of God's law in writing, then it is, in the end, the decision of the philosophers or lawyers (humanistic ethics), of the church (Catholic ethics) or of the theologians (Lutheran ethics), what natural law really includes, and which biblical standards are still in force and which are not. The result of the teaching of the natural law is normally that the “Zeitgeist” or the present state law becomes the law of God.

12. The Law cannot create eternal life or salvation. This is even more true for those who are spiritually dead (Gal 3:21). The Law can not revive. Where sin rules, the Law can only bring about death, but not revive the dead to life. This is already made clear in the OT (e. g. Hab 1:4). The introduction of the Decalogue proves that the grace and the covenant of God come first and the Law second. Man can only live according to the Law under the grace of God and after receiving forgiveness through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

13. Gospel and Law only stand against each other if “law” is understood as salvation by the Law, but not if the Law is understood as God's written Law in the Old and New Testament. In 1 Tim 1:9-11 and Rom 2:12-15 sees the pronouncement of the details of the Law and God's judgement on specific sins as part of his “gospel”.

14. The Law does not improve those, who have come to know it, but only drives them deeper into sin. Without the Spirit of God, even the Christian can at best want to do good, but not do it (Rom 7). If God does not help through his Spirit (Rom 8:3-4) and fulfill His Law in us, then we as Christians are also able to commit the worst. The abolition of the Law would not have eliminated the dilemma of Rom 7. Then God would have changed his own holy standards and confessed that even He could not change man. But now God fulfills his own Law in us through the Holy Spirit. Thus, both requirements are kept: God's holy unchangeable commandments are still valid together with the fact that only God can keep them! Rom 8:3-4 is therefore the fulfillment of the OT promise of a new covenant, where God's Spirit puts God's Law into the heart of His people (Ez 18:31; 36:25-27; Jer 31:3; Hebr 8,10; 10:16).

15. The Law regulates the covenant between God and man. The Law is embodied in God's covenant with man. In many texts, the term “covenant” is used for “law” and vice versa (e. g. Hos 8:1; 2 Chr 34:14; Ps 78:10; Dtn 28).

16. All covenants in the history of salvation (e. g. Noah, Abraham, Mose, David, Jesus) are eternal, because God's oath and promise are irrevocable. God's promises remain in force, and from time to time, new promises are added to the old ones. Therefore, the New Testament takes it for granted that all Christians of today are at the same time included in God's covenant with Noah, Abraham, Mose, David and Jesus Christ. The New Covenant is more glorious than the Old Covenant, just as every period of the history of salvation excels former periods of its glory and extent of revelation. Every progressive step in God's history of salvation leads to changes in how God's covenant with men is put into practice, but neither do God's moral laws change, nor the spiritual principles underlying the outward practice of the covenant.

17. The fate of any given people is decided by its attitude towards God's commandments. This is especially obvious in the covenants described in Lev 26 and Dtn 27-32, which are connected with curse and blessing. The commandments of God and their application leads people to advancement and growth (Dtn 28:13). The violation of God's commandments leads to decline and dependency (Dtn 28:43-44). The texts of the OT dealing with curse and blessing are often mentioned in the NT (e. g. Rom 10:6-8,19; 12:19; 15:10; Hebr 10:28-31).

18. There is a difference between moral and ceremonial law which is visible in the OT and rooted in the NT (e. g. 1 Cor 7:19; Rom 2:28-29). With the moral Law also its punishments remain in force. The regulations for punishment for violating the ceremonial Law are fulfilled together with the fulfillment of the ceremonial Law. They should no longer be applied.

19. The ceremonial Law is fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ, but this must not lead to the conclusion that it had been of inferior quality, that ceremonies as such are unspiritual or that the principles on which the ceremonial Law are based on may be neglected (e. g. the sweeping out of the leaven, the circumcision of the heart or keeping the Sunday holy).

20. The Old Testament rules for a just jurisdiction (e. g. two witnesses, without favoritism, sentence only because of laws) are the divine frame for a just jurisdiction for all peoples. Therefore, these rules are often quoted in the New Testament, and they are also applied to other institutions of the covenant like the church.

21. The biblical basis for capital punishment is Gen 9:5-6 and Rom 13,4: Death is the punishment for bloodshed and the State bears the sword in order to punish the wrongdoer. In the mosaic Law and in the whole of the OT, the necessity of the death penalty for murder and other capital crimes is so often uttered as a commandment, that it is impossible to deny that capital punishment is rooted in God's own character as well as in His commandments. The just vengeance (Ex 21:20) of the OT, carried out by the State, is nowhere abolished in the NT, but explicitly confirmed (Acts 25:11; Rom 13:3-4; Mt 15:4; Hebr 10:28-31; Acts 13:28; Lk 23:40-41; Rev 13:10). Only the Law of God can decide, for which crimes capital punishment is a necessity or a possibility.

22. There is no question, that in the OT God's rule extends not only to the king of Israel, but also to all rulers of the world. Theocracy means in the first place that all authorities in their official acting are bound to God's word; secondly, it means the conviction that it is the church's duty to judge the actions of the authorities according God's word and to exhort the authorities prophetically. "Theocracy" should not be mixed up with "hierocracy" ("ruling of the priests"). God can rule peoples and their State directly and through His Law without the necessity that the insitutionalized Church rules over the state. The biblical division between Church and State must not lead to a division between God and the State and between God's Law and the State.

23. In the OT Law, different levels for a certain law (from the overall principle until the concrete example or case law) can be distinguished: 1) Basic principle; 2) Basic law; 3) Regulations for carrying out; 4) Case law for human beings; 5) Case law for animals. Let's take the example of "reward": 1st level: "God's decree" (Rom 1:32); 2nd level: "each will be rewarded" (1 Cor 3:8); 3rd level: Each man will be rewarded for his own work; 4th level: case law application to the elders; 5th level: case law with the oxen (1 Tim 5:17-18 contains the forth, fifth and third level).

24. God has given different covenant forms of government: self-government (self-discipline), family, church, economy and the local and federal state. Each of these governments gets its authority by being enacted by God's Law, is under God's Law and yet has a different set of structure, tasks, goals, rules and punishments.

25. God's Law will play a central role in the Millennium. Normally it is the postmillennialists who emphasize this. But all eschatological positions must explain

when, where and how the Law of God will play such a prominent role among all the nations, as e. g. in Mi 4:1-4; Is 2:2-4; Is 51:4-5; Ez 37:24. According to Mi 4:1-4; Is 2:2-4 there will be political and personal peace and there will be just, safe and widespread personal ownership, which always go together.