

Jesus and Biblical Law - Part 1

Misunderstanding Biblical Law

Psalm 119:1-8

“Happy are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the LORD.
Happy are those who keep his decrees,
who seek him with their whole heart,
who also do no wrong
but walk in his ways.
You have commanded your precepts
to be kept diligently.
O that my ways may be steadfast
in keeping your statutes!
Then I shall not be put to shame,
having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.
I will praise you with an upright heart,
when I learn your righteous ordinances.
I will observe your statutes;
do not utterly forsake me.”

Psalm 1:1-3

“Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked
or take the path that sinners tread
or sit in the seat of scoffers,
but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.”

Torah/Biblical Law - Pentateuch; 613 law code instructions, literally: teaching or instruction

Misunderstandings of Biblical Law:

- It was/is about earning your way to God/heaven
- It was rejected by Jesus or done away with in favor of grace
- It demands perfection and is an impossible burden
- Ritual impurity = evil or sinful
- Impure people were ostracized or neglected
- It is ethnocentric
- It uniformly obligates all humans in all times and spaces
- It governs external actions, but not the heart
- It is statutory law or a list of legal rules/statutes
- Sacrifices were about God punishing an animal instead of you for your sins
- Sacrifices were needed for forgiveness

Biblical Law Is:

- Ancient Near Eastern common law
- Embedded in narrative
- Takes place within a covenant relationship
- Communally formative
- Within an ancient Israelite context
- Wisdom literature
- Adaptable and requires interpretation
- A description of covenant faithfulness
- A presentation of the consequences of living into Torah or crossing against it

Beginning frameworks:

1. Biblical law describes expressions of faithfulness to a covenant relationship
2. Humanity as the image of God is foundational to the understanding of justice in biblical law

Class overview:

- 02/04 — 1. Intro (Today)
- 02/11 — 2. How Ancient Israelites Read Biblical Law
- 02/18 — Ash Wednesday (No Class)
- 02/25 — 3. Jesus and Biblical Law
- 03/04 — 4. The Gospel and Biblical Law as Covenant Life, Death, and Restoration
- 03/11 — 5. Passover, Sacrifices, and Jesus in Paul and the Gospels
- 03/18 — 6. Jesus and Ritual Impurity in the Gospels
- 03/25 — 7. Atonement, Temple Offerings in Hebrews, and 1 John
- 04/01 — 8. Biblical Law and the Covenant of Israel in Romans and Galatians

Prep for next week: Exodus 20-24**Potential Discussion Questions:**

- How was Biblical Law portrayed to you in your experience at church?
- Have you ever felt or desired to feel the way the author of Psalm 119 does about biblical law?
- Which misconceptions about biblical law surprised you the most?
- Which topic are you most interested in exploring?

Additional Reading:

- Bearing God's Name: Why Sinai Still Matters by Carmen Imes
- What if Jesus Was Serious about Justice? A Visual Guide to the Good News of God's Justice and Mercy by Skye Jethani
- Inconsistencies in the Torah: Ancient Literary Conventions and the Limits of Source Criticism by Rabbi Joshua Berman

