

- ***READ Romans 7:4-12*** It doesn't take anyone too much time reading through the New Testament to come to the understanding that there was a big elephant in the room when it came to the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. In fact, we could go back to the relationship between the two groups even in the Gospels and realize that things just were not good and comfortable. And while there was supposed to be peace between these two groups that were brought together in Christ, the reality is that they still had struggles and those struggles often centered around their understanding and following of the Law of Moses.
- In **Acts 10** we read of the first Gentiles converts of Cornelius and his household, and while we would think that this would a time of great rejoicing among God's people the sad reality is that Peter had to go back to Jerusalem and strongly defend his actions in converting these Gentiles to Christ. Even with what Peter did and the work that took place among the Gentiles through the Gospel, the bottom line is that there continued to be problems with both Jews and Gentiles concerning what to do with the Law of Moses, and those problems can be seen in the New Testament letters.
- Now, we would think some 2,000 years later that things would get better, but that again just isn't the case. Instead, what we have are arguments and discussions not just concerning the Law of Moses and our relationship to it, but we are now having difficulties with understanding how we ought to relate to the whole Old Testament! These difficulties are highlighted from time to time when big name preachers at well known churches makes remarks along the lines of our relationship as Christians to the Old Testament and the Law of Moses. Remarks such as this were made by a man named Andy Stanley, who is the lead pastor for North Point Ministries in the Atlanta area, back in the summer of last year.
- The response that these comments garnered was incredible. In fact, they are still garnering responses because I ran across a couple of articles even within the past couple of months that were responding to his statements nearly eight months after the fact. The reality is that we still sometimes struggle with trying to figure out how it is that we ought to approach the Old Testament and what is contained within it, so this evening we are going to use our time to look at a few of the comments made by Mr. Stanley, compare them with what we find within Scripture. My hope is that we might come to have a better understanding of just how we as Christians ought to approach and use what we have in the Old Testament portions of our Bibles. We'll begin by recognizing that men often run to extreme positions when considering the Old Testament and its teachings.

I. Extremes With Understanding The Old Testament

A. We are bound to follow the teachings of the Law of Moses.

1. While not the most popular of positions, there are some religious groups that would hold to the position that the Old Testament contains the teachings and laws that we are required to keep even today. Orthodox Jews would obviously fall into this category considering the fact that they don't believe that Jesus was the Messiah and that they still continue to look for the promised Savior sent by God.
2. Additionally, we might think of groups such as the Seventh-Day Adventists who hold to the belief that it is Saturday is the divinely given day of worship and religious observance. The official webpage of the Seventh-Day Adventists church states that the observance of Sabbath worship ought to continue because of the roots that it finds within creation and God resting. Their position is not that it is a useful practice, but that it is a require practice.

B. There is nothing useful for us within the Old Testament.

1. Then there are those who will go to the other side of the argument and state that there is nothing from the Old Testament, not just the Law of Moses, that we ought to follow. Andy Stanley's most noted comment is that we, as Christians, ought to "*unhitch*" ourselves from the

Old Testament. One of his statements centered around the fact that Christians shouldn't be getting themselves all worked up about erected statues and the like of the Ten Commandments since those are not part of the Covenant that we have with Christ. More specifically Stanley would say, *"If we're going to create a monument to stand as a testament to our faith, shouldn't it at least be a monument of something that actually applies to us? Participants in the new covenant are not required to obey any of the commandments found in the first part of their Bibles. Participants in the new covenant are expected to obey the single command Jesus issued as part of the new covenant: as I have loved you, so you must love one another."*

2. Stanley would go on to ask, *"The Old Testament was not the go-to source regarding any behavior for the church."* These are some pretty strong words coming from this man, but strong words don't necessarily mean accurate words. We want to give the Berean treatment (**Acts 17:11**) to what was said by this man on this extreme of this issue, and we also want to weight and consider the people on the other side of the issue. Where ought we to stand in regards to the Old Testament and the Law of Moses?

II. A proper and balanced understanding will lead us to know and understand that the Old Testament:

A. ...is not synonymous with the Law of Moses.

1. This conversation could quickly get out of hand if we are not sure to make sure that we are using the proper terms in the discussion. I have heard people say and even made the mistake myself of conflating the Old Testament and Law of Moses as if they are the same thing. While the Law of Moses is contained mostly with the Old Testament, the two terms are not two terms for the same thing. There are portions of the Old Testament that record events prior to the Law of Moses coming into existence. The writings of Genesis and a portion of Exodus record periods in history before the Law of Moses came into affect, so we must be sure that we are using the proper terms when discussing this subject.
2. This is important because the New Testament clearly teaches us that Christians are no longer bound to follow the commands and requirements of the Law of Moses. I know that some would make the argument that we are still required to follow the moral laws of the Law of Moses, but I don't see there being any differentiation between the moral, ceremonial, or dietary guidelines of the Law of Moses as far as what would be fulfilled and done away with upon Jesus completing His mission on earth.
3. Speaking of Jesus and the Law, it is important that we recognize that part of Jesus's mission was to fulfill what was contained within the Law of Moses. Jesus says clearly during His sermon on the mount, *"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill."* (**Matthew 5:17**) Paul would echo these same sentiments in **Ephesians 2:14,15** when he writes, *"For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity."* It was Jesus who came to fulfill the work that the Law had done in preparing the people of Israel for the Messiah. When He fulfilled His duties then the Law of Moses came to no longer have any power over the people of God. However, this does not mean that the Old Testament as a whole lost its authority over God's people.

B. ...is a part of God's inspired revelation to mankind.

1. The Old Testament as a whole cannot be powerless considering the fact that it is still part of the inspired revelation that has been handed down to us from the mind of God. We are well familiar with Paul's words in **II Timothy 3:16,17**, *"All Scripture is inspired (theopneustos=God-breathed) by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so*

that the man of God may be adequate, equipped fore every good work." Paul is very clear that the entirety of the Scriptures given to us by God are useful to teach, reprove, correct, and train us. Included in the all of Scripture must be the Old Testament writings. This is especially true when we consider that the Scriptures they had at this time were not the full Scriptures that we have today. Their Scriptures would have most consisted of the Old Testament.

2. Additionally, the two commandments that Jesus says are foundation of the faith of those who trust in God are that they love God and their neighbors. Where do those laws originate? They find there roots in the teachings of not just the Old Testament, but more specifically the Law of Moses. (**Matthew 22:35-40; Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18**) We must understand that many of the teachings that are from Christ and His Apostles find their roots not just in the Old Testament but also in the Law. Therefore, we have to recognize that Andy Stanley's statement about nothing in Christ finding its roots or source in the Old Testament simply isn't true or accurate.
 3. There are laws and commandments that have been preserved even with the changing of the covenants (similar to laws concerning not muzzling the working ox [**I timothy 5:18**], obeying our parents [**Ephesians 6:1,2**], and how we handle disputes and disagreement amongst ourselves [**Matthew 18:15-20**]), and we should respect and follow them just as we should anything else that has been continued in Christ. It isn't that we should "unhitch" ourselves from the Old Testament, but we simply need to learn how to handle it properly so that we might get the most out of it that we can.
- C. ...gives a complete understanding of God's plan for the salvation of fallen man.
1. We made mention of this in Duane's Hebrews class a couple of weeks back, but we must recognize that though we might have the ability to be disciples of Jesus and be faithful to Him without the Old Testament writings, the reality is that we are much more able to clearly see God's full plan for the salvation of mankind because of our having the Old Testament writings available for our use.
 2. To me, this is most clearly seen in **Galatians 3:15-29** as Paul is trying to instruct the Galatians as to how they ought to value the Law of Moses that their people were once under. In order to help them understand who they are in Christ, Paul uses the Old Testament writings before the Law and during the Law. Before the Law, there were great promises made to Abraham concerning his seed that would come to bless all people. Paul specifies that the seed was referring to Christ. (**15,16**) He then goes on to point out that the Law came 430 later, but that this Law did not invalidate the promises God made to Abraham. Both were able to exist together because the promise had not yet been fulfilled concerning the seed. (**17,18**)
 3. However, this doesn't mean that the Law wasn't doing God's word during this time. It too was doing the work of God in illuminating the people of their sins and need for forgiveness. They were given ways in which to rectify their sin for the time being until the Christ came to fulfill the promise made to Abraham and the Law of Moses which is exactly what we saw Jesus knew He had to do. (**19-22; Matthew 5:17**) Once Jesus came and established His covenant then the Law of Moses was no longer needed for it had served its purpose. In Christ there would no longer be Jews and Gentiles but every person would simply be one with another in Christ. Without the Old Testament teachings and storyline, we would have no idea how all of this fits together, and our faith simply wouldn't be everything that it can be with the entirety of Scripture at our fingertips.
- D. ...is useful for our instruction and encouragement.
1. We are able to be great in our faiths not just because of the teachings of Christ and His Apostles, but we are able to be stronger in our faiths because we have many examples that we can look to in the Old Testament that teach us many valuable and important lessons. Paul was pretty clear on this

issue in two separate letters to two separate groups of disciples in both **Romans 15:4** and **I Corinthians 10:1-13** Paul speaks to the useful nature of what took place, was written in earlier times, and was preserved. The Old Testament writings teach us important lessons!

2. Additionally, we are able to better comprehend who we are to be in Christ and what Christ has done for us because of what is found within the Old Testament. For example, we are able to understand better our roles as temples for God because of what we read about the temple in the Old Testament. We are able to understand better our role as priests because of what was required of the priest under the Law. We are better able to understand Christ as the ultimate and perfect Lamb of God who was sent to take away the sins of the world. Sure we might be able to learn something about animal sacrifices from the Letter to the Hebrews, but our understanding of what is said within that Letter will only be hindered by our inability to look back at the history of Israel and their time spent under the Law of Moses. We could spend a lot of time talking about the great value that is found by our considerations of the Old Testament. By no means should we unhitch ourselves from it and act as if it has no positive impact upon our faiths!

E. ...will not be the standard by which we are judged.

1. However, we must be sure that whatever it is that we do in the name of Jesus is actually done by the authority of Jesus. While there are many good things about the Old Testament that can help us to be better Christians, we must recognize that we will only be saved through our faithfulness to Christ. This is true for a couple of reasons. Firstly, Jesus is simply better than what is found within the Old Testament and everything it contains. Whoever it was that wrote Hebrews seemed to be very much convinced of this truth. Speaking of Jesus as being the High Priest of this new covenant it is written, *"But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises."* (**Hebrews 8:6**) Secondly, Moses didn't die for us. His blood was not shed for the opportunity for us to have our sins forgiven. He remains in the grave while Jesus is alive and reigning in heaven. Things are simply in a better place with Christ being the One with whom we have established a covenant.
2. Further, we must remember that when Jesus comes back to judge the world, He is going to judge us based upon the covenant that we are under. Those who were under the Law will be judged by the Law and it having been fulfilled by Jesus, but we as people in covenant with Christ will only be judged by what is contained within the covenant of Christ. As people during Jesus's day rejected the words that He was stating, He tells them that they are rejecting that which will judge them. *"If any hears My saying and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I didn't come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me and does not receive My saying, has one who judges him; the word I spoke will judge him at the last day."* (**John 12:47,48**) We, today, have the words of Jesus available to us, and when we stand before Jesus in judgment we will be judged by those words and not that which was written by Moses or the Prophets. Sure we obey nine out of the famous ten commandments, but we don't do so because they were given by Moses. We obey those commandments because they have been reemphasized by our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our King, and as His people we must be fully committed to obeying all that He has demanded of us.

I must be honest with you, there are so many different nuances and aspects of this conversation that simply can't be addressed in a single lesson or even a long series of lessons, but I hope that each of us will simply take away that it isn't as cut and dry when it comes to how we ought to operate concerning the Old Testament. We cannot fully out reject and we also cannot fully out live by its teachings and commandments for it is still exceptionally important to our faiths. May we be thankful to God for what we have in the Old Testament, and may we take time throughout our lives to open it so that we might right, learn, and be encouraged to persevere by the words contained within its pages.