

How Does God's Law Apply to Me?

Crucial Questions

R. C. SPROUL

How Does God's Law Apply to Me?

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Published by Reformation Trust Publishing

A division of Ligonier Ministries

421 Ligonier Court, Sanford, FL 32771

Ligonier.org ReformationTrust.com

Printed in China

RR Donnelley

0001018

First edition

ISBN 978-1-64289-123-2 (Paperback)

ISBN 978-1-64289-124-9 (ePub)

ISBN 978-1-64289-125-6 (Kindle)

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Cover design: Ligonier Creative

Interior typeset: Katherine Lloyd, The DESK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Sproul, R.C. (Robert Charles), 1939-2017 author.

Title: How does God's law apply to me? / by R.C. Sproul.

Description: Orlando : Reformation Trust, 2019. | Series: Crucial Questions No. 30

Identifiers: LCCN 2018036542 | ISBN 9781642891232 (Paperback) | ISBN 9781642891249 (ePub) | ISBN 9781642891256 (Kindle)

Subjects: LCSH: Law and gospel.

Classification: LCC BT79 .S67 2019 | DDC 241/.2--dc 3

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018036542>

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Chapter One

Oh, How I Love Your Law!

Where should a study of God's law and its role in the Christian life begin? Some might consider the Ten Commandments the place to start, while others would turn to the book of Deuteronomy. Perhaps very few people might think of starting in the Psalms, but that is precisely where our journey begins.

Psalm 119, the longest psalm in the Psalter, is a magnificent celebration of the law of God. It is an acrostic, meaning that it is divided into twenty-two stanzas, one

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for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, with each line of a given stanza beginning with the same letter. The idea is that of an exhaustive celebration of the law—from A to Z, we might say. This notion of celebrating God's law may seem completely archaic in our day because we are familiar with the teachings of the New Testament. We rejoice in being redeemed from the law. As Scripture says, "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

As a result, we tend to consider the Old Testament law completely irrelevant to our Christian lives today. Against this modern-day backdrop of rampant disregard for the Old Testament law, we do well to consider the words of the psalmist:

Oh how I love your law!

It is my meditation all the day.

Your commandment makes me wiser than my
enemies,

for it is ever with me.

I have more understanding than all my teachers,
for your testimonies are my meditation.

I understand more than the aged,
for I keep your precepts.

Oh, How I Love Your Law!

I hold back my feet from every evil way,
in order to keep your word.
I do not turn aside from your rules,
for you have taught me.
How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Through your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.
(Ps. 119:97–104)

This section of Psalm 119 does not begin by imparting information but by voicing an exclamation. The word “Oh!” expresses a sigh of profoundly deep feeling, and in this case, the feeling is one of affection.

Do we often hear Christians say, “The thing I love the most about my Christian experience is the law of God”? Do we hear people in the church today celebrate the depth of their affection for the law of God? The obvious answer is no. But as we explore the law of God in these pages, we should begin to ask why Christians don’t have a greater appreciation for God’s law.

What is it about Christ and His work that would cause us now to despise or ignore what was the focal point of

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delight in the lives of Old Testament saints? Perhaps it's the assumption that the Old Testament law is no longer relevant to New Testament Christians and has no bearing upon our Christian growth. We reason that the law was for Old Testament believers, not for us today. To us, the Christian life is Christ, not Moses; it's gospel, not law.

We are much more likely to hear Christians voice depths of passion with exclamations such as "Oh, how I love You, Jesus!" or "Oh, how I love You, Lord!" But how might the Lord Jesus respond to these sentiments? His words to the nascent church are likely the same words He would speak to us today: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

For a Christian to say, "I once loved the law, but now I love Christ and ignore the law," is simply not to love Christ, because Christ loved the law. His meat and His drink, the Scriptures tell us, was to do the will of the Father (John 4:34). Jesus viewed His entire life as a mission to fulfill every single point of the law and to achieve perfect obedience to the commandments of God. His motive was not to keep a list of rules but to do the will of the Father. And the Father clearly expresses His will through His law.

Throughout Psalm 119, there is a constant interchange

between the words “law” and “word.” Christians today may speak in glowing terms of their affection for the Word of God, but we have a tendency to divorce the Word of God from the law of God. However, that dichotomy is not evident in this psalm, where throughout we see the psalmist reciting his affection repeatedly both for the law and for the Word of God. Why did the psalmist love the law of God so much?

The first thing to note is that the law expressed God’s commandments, that which He wanted His people to do. When kings, presidents, leaders, or others who sit in seats of authority utter a directive, their word is not to be challenged. They are the final court of appeals, so there is no room for discussion. Their word is law.

Has anything changed about God that we would disregard His directives? Is His word still law? Is He still as sovereign as He was in the Old Testament? Is the God of Israel and of the New Testament church a commandment-giving God? His word is law, and His law is His word, because His law expresses His will. And that will, that law, is sweeter than honey (Ps. 119:103).

The book of Psalms begins with this benediction from on high: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel

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of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers” (Ps. 1:1). This verse refers to a person who does not live according to the patterns, customs, and general wisdom of ungodly people. Translated into modern-day language, it might read like this: “Blessed is the man who is not a conformist to the cultural customs and patterns of our own society, who doesn’t follow the popular wisdom of our day.” Here in Psalm 1, a blessing is pronounced upon people who don’t do certain things. And what is the positive side? “But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (v. 2).

We might be tempted to rewrite this today and say, “Foolish is the man who delights in the law of the Lord and wastes his time meditating on it day and night.” We might think that only a legalist takes delight in the law and spends more than five minutes a year meditating upon it. But God says, “Blessed is the man. . . .”

The psalmist goes on to say, “He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season” (v. 3). Imagine the Judean wilderness that the psalmist and his original readers would have been familiar with. Think of the dry shoot that comes out of the ground in that barren wasteland, where any foliage that lives must fight to survive

against the beating sun and the parched earth every hour of every day. And in the distance, picture an oasis where the trees are lush, full, and heavy with fruit because they are planted by the stream. Or picture the mouth of the Jordan River and the trees that grow right next to it, whose roots go deep into the ground, absorbing the moisture and the nutrients. These trees are robust and plentiful in the fruit that they produce. So in effect, God says, “Blessed is the man who meditates on My law day and night. He won’t be like a tree that’s planted in the middle of the desert with one tiny little root struggling to survive. He will be like the tree planted by the rivers of living water, bringing forth fruit in its season.”

If there is a secret that lies hidden from the view of the modern Christian, that secret is found in the books of the Old Testament—not just in the Law, but also in the Prophets and the Wisdom Literature—all of which together reveal the character of God. If we wonder why God seems foreign to us, like an alien or an intruder into our lives; if we stumble and grope in darkness trying to understand how to live in a relativistic age; and if we feel like pieces of chaff that the wind drives away with the slightest breeze; then we need to go back and consider the law of God.

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In the pages to come, we will explore the nature of the law in the Bible, and particularly, in the Ten Commandments, also known as the Decalogue. How did it function in the life of Israel in the Old Testament? And what is the relevance of the old covenant law now that we are in the new covenant? Is there any application of the Old Testament law to our day?

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Does God require me to obey the Ten Commandments?

Christians often struggle to understand the role of God's law in their lives. They may distort the law, turning it into a checklist to try to earn God's favor, or they may live as though the law doesn't apply to them.

In this booklet, Dr. R.C. Sproul explains the purpose of the moral law and how it applies to Christians today. As he walks through each of the Ten Commandments, we see that the law doesn't merely expose our sin; it also reveals the character of a holy and gracious God and shows us how to live lives that are pleasing to Him.

The Crucial Questions booklet series by Dr. R.C. Sproul offers succinct answers to important questions often asked by Christians and thoughtful inquirers.

Dr. R.C. Sproul was founder of Ligonier Ministries, founding pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla., and first president of Reformation Bible College. He was author of more than one hundred books, including *The Holiness of God*.



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ISBN 978-1-64289-123-2



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