

Jason Upchurch - Q & A - July 2022 - Discernment and the OC Law

Philippians 1:9-11

One of the most valuable experiences in my life was my time at Bible College in Los Angeles - that's the case for a lot of reasons. By the way, I'm just going to give a shameless plug for my alma mater The Master's University. It is a wonderful Bible College and for those who are headed for academia and want a truly God-honoring basis, I recommend it highly.

But in my time in Bible College there are probably a dozen things that stand out in my mind as being impactful, one them is attending Grace Community Church, John MacArthur's church, and one the most impactful things about that was that occasionally on Sunday evenings he would do Q & A sermons. People could step up to the microphone, ask a question, and MacArthur would give an answer. It was a way of getting an idea, to some extent anyway, what people in his congregation might be wrestling with personally or theologically.

And although if I had just one question to ask John, I might not have picked those ones, I almost always learned some valuable things during those Q & A sermons. So I've made it something of a tradition that when I finish preaching through a book, I give space for people to text me or email me or write down questions and hand them to me so I can prepare and use it in the form of a sermon.

I am thoroughly committed to expository preaching where we go verse by verse through books of the Bible because I think that best helps us understand the Word of God. The one big downside is that there are some issues we might not talk about for a long time because of that. This affords us an opportunity to touch on those issues that we might not have had the opportunity to work through. And my hope is that it will bless all of you as you consider these things.

So this morning we'll tackle 3 questions.

1) Does God give discernment to the unsaved? I don't think my brother and my mom are saved, but sometimes they seem to exhibit biblical discernment.

When we're talking about discernment we're talking about the ability to know what is best in God's eyes. Or we could also say what is right or wrong in God's eyes. So let me talk about discernment in general, and then come to the question specifically.

First off, life is complicated. Rarely are issues simply black and white. We have to carefully weigh what God would want in particular situations where it's not obvious. Notice here Paul's prayer for the Philippians. **Read 9-12**

Paul wants the Philippians to grow here. They have a heart to love people. The problem is their love seems to be lacking in knowledge or discernment. But they are naive and their love is somewhat foolish.

It's like someone wanting to help the homeless guy on the side of the road holding a sign. Just give them a \$20, something. He's human, he needs food.

That might be motivated out of love, but it lacks knowledge and discernment. That \$20 is probably not going to food, is it? It probably going to drugs. And so the act of compassion and love is missing information and missing discernment. Don't give them \$20, offer them some food or a ride to Union Gospel Mission. At the very least get to know someone before giving them money.

As believers we want our love to abound more and more. We want to be pure and blameless when we stand before the Lord Jesus. But we need godly discernment and wisdom to do that. To discern how situations should be handled.

The classic illustration here is that not too many people can tell the difference between a diamond and a cubic zirconium. It takes skill and knowledge to test and discern the difference. That's how many of our situations are

in life: what's good versus what is best. But that's what all believers are called to when expressing love to people.

Morally and theologically we want to be able to tell the difference between good and the best. That's discernment: the ability to know what's best in God's eyes often in tough situations.

What about unbelievers? Can they be discerning in a biblical sense? Well, we know that unbelievers do not have the Holy Spirit inside of them. They are not regenerate and they do not bring glory to God. They are depraved sinners, just like all were before coming to faith in Jesus. Total depravity is the biblical teaching that sin affects every part of who we are: spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally, relationally.

Spurgeon: "As the salt flavors every drop in the Atlantic, so does sin affect every atom of our nature." That's total depravity: sin affects all of who we are. That's what the Bible teaches.

But while we hold to total depravity, we reject utter depravity. Utter depravity is that we are as bad as we can possibly be and there are no redeeming qualities to humanity whatsoever.

We reject that. And there are plenty of times where we learn things from unbelievers.

Jesus gave the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is a story about an unbeliever showing believers how to love their neighbor.

Jesus says in **Matt. 5** even unbelieving tax collectors know how to love people to some extent.

God often gives people common grace to understand and believe things that are in line with the Bible.

I read a book called *Being Mortal* written by a Hindu doctor that I think has a better theology of medical decisions at the end of life than your average Christian. Not because he's Hindu, but because his view of life and medicine line up with the Bible more than most Christians.

I know of a Muslim economist who understands money and fiscal policy better than most Christians. Again, I don't agree with a thing Muslims believe, but his understanding lines up with biblical stewardship and an understanding of finance.

God does grant unbelievers wisdom in some of these areas and we would be foolish to not consider what unbelievers have to say.

I mean imagine your unbelieving uncle was the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. If you were going to start your own business wouldn't you at least give him a call to see if he had any tips? Of course.

Turn to 1 Cor. 1 here we see the doctrine of election. Why does God choose some and not others? Here's an interesting answer. **Read 1:26-31**

Who does God usually choose for salvation? The weak, poor and nobodys. Which means that many times unbelievers - the people God does not choose - are wiser than we are, at least in some respect. They're smarter with money, they have more worldly influence and elite training.

God straight up says that some unbelievers are incredibly smart. They do incredible good. Very business savvy, money savvy, relational savvy. George Washington was not a Christian, but it was clear that God had gifted him with extraordinary military skill.

We use technology every day that atheists and Buddhists and new age folks created for the glory of their own flesh, but that we use to the glory of God.

So unbelievers can be wise in a sense. Sometimes their wisdom aligns with God's wisdom. And sometimes they're wiser than Christians. I think it was Martin Luther who said "I'd rather be ruled by a wise Turk than a foolish Christian."

I have family members who are unbelievers and it often catches me by surprise how clear they are that homosexuality is a sin, or that lying is objectively wrong.

It's because they are not utterly depraved. So, yes, unbelievers do have a certain amount of wisdom discernment and we should praise God in his common grace for that.

The next 2 questions have to do with how we relate to the OT Law. The first question is specifically about the 10 Commandments, the second more about all the other laws.

Now, let me just say before we dive in here that I think a lot of believers neglect the OT. And some of this comes from a misunderstanding of how we understand the Law and it's relationship to us.

But all the Bible is the Word of God. **Turn to 2 Tim. 3:16-17.**

2) Why do we keep all 10 commandments but not the sabbath day?

That's a great question! The answer, in short, is that we don't keep any of the 10 commandments. We've been completely freed from all of the OT Law.

Rom. 6:14: we are no longer under the law, but under grace.

Gal. 3:25: Now that faith in Jesus has come, we are no longer under the Law as a guardian.

Mark 7:19 Jesus declared all foods clean - so all the food laws are gone.

There is no Temple or priesthood anymore, so none of those laws apply.

Jer. 31:31-34: Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

We are under the New Covenant, no longer under the Old Covenant. And that old covenant was defined primarily by the 10 commandments. Some rabbi once supposedly counted all the commands in the OT and it came to 613, including the 10 commandments. You could argue that the other 603 are really just an expansion of the 10.

Turn to Heb. 7:11-12, 18-19. Here in Hebrews the author is making this very argument. That Jesus is a high priest but the problem is he's from the wrong tribe. He's from Judah, not Levi. This is a problem because under the OC he couldn't be a priest. And what the author is saying is that one way we know we're not under the OC anymore is that Jesus is our priest and he's from a different tribe.

Why does that matter? Because if you have a different priesthood, then you're also under a different law. **Read 11-19**

Did you see in **Vs. 12** that if there is a change in priesthood there's a change in the Law? So we are no longer under the Law.

The author goes on to say that Jesus gives us a better Covenant and because of that the first covenant - the Old Covenant God made with Moses on Sinai - is gone. **Read 8:13**

When the author of Hebrews wrote this letter, it was likely that the Temple in Jerusalem was still standing. But Rome was threatening to tear it down. That's why it is ready to vanish away.

So here's the best analogy I can give you as to why we keep 9 of the 10 commandments. When America separated from Britain in 1776, we were saying we were no longer under their laws. We were no longer British, no longer subject to their way of life. But we actually repeated some of the laws that they have. We can't murder in America. We can't steal. But the reason we don't murder or steal isn't because we're following British Law, it's because we're under American Law. There are similarities, but there's a substantial difference.

In the same way, we're not under the OC Law anymore. We follow what the NT calls the Law of Christ.

Gal. 6:2 we are to fulfill the Law of Christ

1 Cor. 9:21: Paul becomes as one under the Law - he follows OC Law when he's around Jewish unbelievers to have the opportunity to convert them - but he's not under the Law, but under the Law of Christ.

The Law of Christ is the fullness of love expressing itself in commands as NC Christians. Now, many of his commands are similar or exactly the same. Nine of the 10 commandments are reiterated in the NC. And Jesus wants us to obey him not just externally, but from the heart.

1 John 2:7-8: Beloved I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment that you heard. At the same time it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is shining.

But many of the Laws have not been reintroduced. We don't have to worship on New Moons or Sabbaths. We don't need to be circumcised or observe the Day of Atonement. All foods are clean for us to eat, and we don't sacrifice at the Temple.

But if you go read Deuteronomy a lot of the Laws in the OC are really good. They're very common sense laws that we would do well to apply in our own situations because they are given by God and come from the character of God.

I actually think it's really good for people to build in weekly downtime - a weekly day of rest. But I don't call it a Sabbath because I think that's a theological category error. I would encourage you to read Deuteronomy, there's a lot of laws that are really, really good and we should consider how to apply. Not because we're under the Law, but because they reflect the character of God.

So all that to say, because we're in the NC we don't keep any of the 10 commandments. We've died to the OC Law. But we do keep the Law of Christ - the commands and prohibitions given in the NT. And if those overlap with the OC, that's just fine.

3) Are all commands in the old testament abolished with the establishment of the new covenant? As an example, I know someone who has a friend that claims that men are supposed to have a beard but the basis comes from the Old Testament.

So I think with what we've seen, we know the answer is yes. So the OT Law, as a way of life for the people of God, is no longer our Law.

Turn to Rom. 7:1-6. Here's the really technical answer: The OT Law still exists in full force. But we have died to that Law. And Paul gives an analogy from marriage to help us understand this relationship. **Read 1-4**

So the analogy is that we're married until death do us part. When one person dies, the other is completely free to remarry. Watch who died in the relationship between us and the Law. **Read 5-7**

Did the Law die? No. We died. When God saved us through faith in Jesus, we were united to Jesus in his death. And so we died to the Law. And we were raised back to spiritual life in Christ in order to live for God.

Now, can we use the Law? Yes! I think we would be wise to use the Law. How do we use the Law? I think we can use the Law in evangelism to show guilt.

This is the Ray Comfort Law-Based evangelism. Have you ever lied? Have you ever stolen anything? Have you ever looked on someone with lust? If so, you're a lying, thieving adulterer at heart. So if you stand before God on the day of judgment are you innocent or guilty? You're guilty.

People need to understand that they're guilty before a holy God before they understand their need for salvation by grace.

You can also use the Law in specific ways to inform our Christian conduct. **Look at Exo 22. Read 5-6**

We might call this neighborly negligence. What if we accidentally do injury to someone else's property? Well under the Law we made a full restitution. I think we understand that.

Turn to Deut 22. We know that for most laws God was trying to maintain some kind of principle. For the food laws and the clothing laws, I think the principle was simply that Israel was to be distinct from the nations. There was no cooking revolution that occurred or fashion revolution that occurred after the resurrection. I think some of the laws were simply to keep Israel weird and obviously distinct from the gentile nations around them.

But many others were practical. **Read 1-8**

So farm animals were very expensive in ancient times. You're required to help your brother whose cattle goes astray.

There was no cross dressing in Israel. This isn't so much about pants and skirts as it is about gender distinction. We're not the only culture to battle sexual sin.

And we have a property law. Most Israelites would sleep on the roof for some amount of the year. Build a fence so people don't fall off. We take basic safety measures for us and our neighbors. Maybe you don't like getting permits, but many exist for a reason.

So we don't follow any of the Law as a means of Christian conduct per se - not trimming our beards or wearing single cloth garments. But we can use the Law to show guilt and inform our Christian conduct.

It's hard 2,000 years this side of the cross to understand how big of a deal not following the OT Law as a way of life would have been. God's people had used the Law for almost 1,400 years before Jesus. AND for God to say "it's no longer needed" was a hard pill to swallow.

But it's a good pill. It's a good change. And we praise God we're no longer under the Law.

Pray