



OVERVIEW

The precise role the Law has for moral standards, orthodoxy, and orthopraxy has befuddled believers since the very beginning. After enjoying a direct, walk in the evening, personal relationship with the Lord God, we pushed against the Law. What's wrong with simply having a taste of that fruit? Surely, we won't die for merely eating some fruit.

After considerable history, the Lord God articulated the Law via what is sometimes called the Pentateuch, or the Torah, or simply the "Law of Moses." With the invention of written language, the Law became a linguistic manifestation of the Lord God's will. While the Law clarified some things, it introduced humanity to one of its major failings—if this is what I must do, or what I cannot do, how little must I do, or how much can I do that I should not? Like four year olds, we love testing the boundaries.

In the midst of all this, we have forgotten the purpose of the Law. We have made it an object of worship. We have made the Law a burden, rather than a blessing. Ironically, we have derided its legitimacy by ignoring the Law's precepts, especially when it is convenient to do so. While on the one hand we applaud the Law for its superior moral standard, we become virtual pagans when deciding those standards do not apply to "us," or to "this situation," or only for "them."

So, we remain befuddled. And rightly so. For we adopted a *human* view of the Law, using *our* operationalization of "law," and we have applied *our* precepts to the Law. The Law is more than a set of moral rules, guidelines, and directions. When we forget the purpose of the Law, we forget its Author, and why He deigned that His will be known via mere linguistics. Understanding the Law is difficult, but possible. And as Martin Luther noted, "if you distinguish the Gospel from the Law, you are a theologian."

Let the befuddlement end.

KEY PREMISES

- ⌘ While the Hebrew Scriptures contain *quantitatively* more moral laws and duties, the NT is more important *qualitatively* for Christian ethics—the NT is explicitly directed toward Spirit-indwelled believers.
- ⌘ NT moral law and duties are based upon (i.e., it illustrates and clarifies) the Hebrew Scriptures. See, for instance, Matthew 5:21,27,33,38,43 ... "You have heard it said ..., but **I** say ..."
- ⌘ Indeed, I argue in this article, there is no *new* morality revealed in the NT.



♪ KEY NOTE ♪

The Law: Creates knowledge of sin, and hopefully a sense of needing to be saved from sin's consequences—separation from God.





HOW ONE GREAT TEACHER BEGAN, IDENTIFIED, AND RESOLVED THE "LAW" QUESTION

Matthew 5:17 – *I came not to destroy the Law but to fulfill the Law.*

Basic Premise. The Law is true and righteous because it reflects its Author and who He is. The authority is neither under nor over the Law; the authority is Law. The Law is right and true because it reflects God Himself.

Therefore, Jesus the Christ can say, and we can believe with all assured trust (faith), that He came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. A "fulfilled" law satisfies the Law-Giver. It satisfies the Law-Executor. It satisfies the Seeker of Justice. This may be the greatest statement of the Gospel—the Law is fulfilled. God is satisfied.

**The
Law**

So, when we say "the Law requires sacrifice" for sin, we are only partially correct. The Law is the articulated operationalization of the nature and character of the Lord God Jehovah. Thus, it is God's *character* which requires sacrifice for sin, its propitiation, its cleansing.

But, what was Jesus saying when Matthew used the word "fulfill" in 5:17? The Greek is πληροω (4137; "play-row-oh") which is used in Scripture with a wide range of meanings: to complete, to accomplish, to obey, to clarify, to bring to maturity, to ratify, to culminate, and/or to perfect. Thus, there are a variety of conclusions which one might draw from Christ's statement. How you view the "difference" between the "old" and the "new" testaments will largely affect what verb you choose.

1. *Discontinuity.* If you believe that Christ came to "complete" the Law, then its constraints on human behavior are lifted—they no longer bind us.
2. *Hyper-Continuity.* If you believe that Christ came to "ratify" the Law, then its constraints continue to this day.
3. *Continuity.* If you believe that Christ came to "bring to maturity" the Law, then its constraints need to be understood fully (e.g., "... you have heard it said, but **I** say ...").

[This passage was adapted from an excerpt from Lesson Plan notes for Sunday, October 14, 2007 as created on October 10, 2007 by D. Thomas Porter while on staff at Myrtle Lake Baptist Church, Land O' Lakes, Florida 34639. Copyright © 2016 by D. Thomas Porter.]



SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT – DISCONTINUITY VS. CONTINUITY

DISCONTINUITY

The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. Luke 16:16

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:17

For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. Rom 6:14

Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Rom 10:4

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. Gal 5:18

CONTINUITY

It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law. Luke 16:17

Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law. Rom 3:31

So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Rom 7:12

Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts. I Cor 7:19

Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. Gal 3:21

We know that the law is good—if one uses it properly. 1 Timothy 1:8



THREE APPROACHES TO THE LAW/GOSPEL QUESTION:

♪ KEY NOTE ♪

Avoid foolish disputes (Titus 3:9). But, we still have to figure it out (see Paul's admonitions regarding Bible study—Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

DISCONTINUITY, HYPER-CONTINUITY, CONTINUITY

Basic Premises

- ⌘ Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.
- ⌘ These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!
- ⌘ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

"DISCONTINUITY" APPROACH

The NT alone is normative for the Christian life. Cf. the Law of Moses vs. the Law of Christ in 1 Corinthians 9:21 and Galatians 6:2; OT laws repeated in the NT, however, are valid. For Biblical support see Romans 6:14-15, 10:4, Galatians 5:18

⌘ Discontinuity Examples ...

Nazarene

church of Christ

Marcion and other antinomians

Eastern Orthodox (some)

Many Christians (in practice)

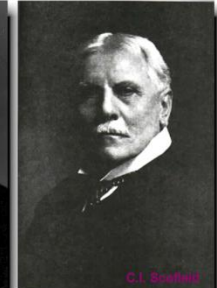
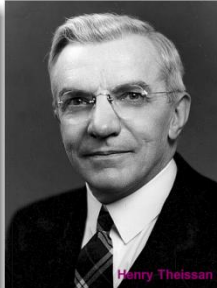
⌘ Traditional dispensationalists:

Charles Ryrie,

L.S. Chafer,

Henry Thiessen,

C.I. Scofield





Problems with Discontinuity

1. Never a majority view of the church; while that does not prove anything, it does suggest something may be "off."
2. Has difficulty with "authority is law" paradigm; typically embraces "authority over law" resulting in a tenuous view of sanctification. Challenge: Does God have an unchanging character?
3. Historically, given this view of the nature of law, discontinuity has resulted in legalism, antinomianism (Marcion), and often abandonment of the position.
4. By claiming Jesus annulled the Law, people's problem was not that they had the Law, but they could not follow it. Is then God at fault? After all, God gave people the Law.
5. Seems illogical since there are no "new" commandments—minimizes the unity of the Scripture (cf. 2 Tim 3:16-17; Matt 5:19, 17:3; Rom 15:4, Eph 2:20).
6. Opens the door to Bible deconstructionism, a slippery slope as it were.
7. Reduces the Hebrew Scriptures to an historical document with little practical relevance to and for the Church; [e.g., "...the Old Testament is only valuable in that it helps understand the New."]

"HYPER-CONTINUITY" APPROACH

The Law found in Hebrew Scriptures is still binding in Christians. Ceremonial law, however, is not in effect because Jesus has fulfilled the Law's *ceremonial* laws (Matt 5:17; Romans 10:4). Jesus the Christ is not only our high priest, but also our sacrificial lamb.

- ⌘ Civil laws are still in effect except where nullified by circumstance (e.g., architecture, sanitation systems, etc.)
- ⌘ Moral law is still in effect and needs to be kept in totality.

The Hebrew Scripture civil laws must be implemented by civil government in order to spread the kingdom of Christ and hasten His return. For Biblical support see:

- ✓ 1 Corinthians 5:1ff and 1 Timothy 5:18; to wit, many OT civil laws are upheld in the NT (shows civil law is still binding)
- ✓ NT passages imply unity of the entire Law found in the Hebrew Scriptures (Gal 3:10; James 2:10)

Advocates

- ✓ Christian Re-Constructivists; e.g., Rousas John Rushdooney;¹ Greg Bahnsen;² Gary North³

¹Rousas John Rushdoony was a Calvinist philosopher, historian, and theologian and is widely credited as the father of Christian Reconstructionism and an inspiration for the modern Christian homeschool movement. For an example of his thoughts, see <http://chalcedon.edu/research/articles/the-meaning-of-theocracy/> His views have led to charges of racism, anti-Semitism, and outright meanness.

²Bahnsen was a pillar of the Christian Reconstruction movement associated with [Rousas John Rushdoony](#). As such, Bahnsen was a leading proponent of [theonomy](#), [postmillennialism](#), and [presuppositional apologetics](#). He lectured to a broad range of evangelical Christian groups at many colleges and conferences, in the United States and abroad. His 1985 debate with atheist scholar, the late Gordon Stein, was dubbed The Great Debate, and remains a classic as well as a benchmark in Christian apologetics. From <https://www.theopedia.com/greg-bahnsen>

³Gary Kilgore North is an American Christian Reconstructionist theorist and economic historian. North has authored or co-authored over fifty books on topics including Christian theology, economics, and history. Spouse, Sharon Rushdooney.



- ✓ Many post-millennialists
- ✓ Judaizers – “you must keep the commandments.”

Problems with Hyper-Continuity

1. Never a majority view of the church; again, while that does not prove anything, it does suggest something may be “off.”
2. View is inconsistent; to wit, decisions upon which laws are binding appear to be based on convenience or cultural mores rather than nature of the law.
3. There is no theocracy in which to implement, interpret and enforce the OT civil laws.
4. In the Hebrew Scriptures, civil laws were never prescribed for the pagan nations. To wit,
 - ✓ Pre-Christ believers were given different laws for dealing with pagan nations (Deuteronomy 23:19-20)
 - ✓ NT examples seem to indicate God has abrogated the civil laws found in the Hebrew Scriptures (cf. Romans 13).
5. View of church-state relations seems tenuous at best. In reality, the State maintains order—the church spreads the kingdom.
6. Yet, the fundamentals of all law in the states of the United States, with the exception of Louisiana, is based on British Common Law, which in turn was based on pastoral interpretation in the early post-French days of Great Britain. Much of Tort Law, for example, was/is based on the notion that property owners are accountable for injuries on their property.

For example, Deuteronomy 22:8 commands builders to construct a parapet (or railing) around the flat roof of a new house to prevent accidental falls and avoid "bloodguilt" (liability for injury). This law emphasized personal responsibility, neighborly love, and safety in ancient Israelite architecture, where roofs were used for living, sleeping, and socializing.



"CONTINUITY" APPROACH

This approach divides the Law found in the Hebrew Scriptures into 3 categories of Law — ceremonial, civil, and moral. The continuity approach typically argues only *moral* laws are still binding. Furthermore, the continuity approach argues that the Law is a reflection of the Lord God's character, and thus *moral* law began before the articulation of same in the Torah, and the Prophets, and the New Testament. Thus, it is normatively coherent to say *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus [the] Christ.* —John 1:17.

- A. "Ceremonial" — Religious-ritual-cultic" rules/laws for functioning of sacrificial system. For example consider...
- ⌘ Religious festivals, dietary regulations (because unclean animals symbolize your uncleanness and thus are deemed "ceremonial" in nature). See Leviticus 11 and Deut 14:1-21.
 - ⌘ Laws were a prefigure for the work of the Christ and were fulfilled (πληρωω, play-row-oh; not *abrogated*) by Jesus the Christ. John 2:19, 5:46; 1 Cor 5:7; Col 2:16-17; Heb 10:1-10)
 - ⌘ Ceremonial law is inextricably linked to moral law — pre-Christ believers often broke the moral law and could not approach God.
 - ⌘ These pre-Christ believers did not categorize these laws as "ceremonial" because all were applicable to them as Hebrews, Israelites, Jews.
- B. "Civil" — "judicial casuistic case" laws for governance of the Hebrew theocracy.
- ⌘ Civil laws are the moral laws applied in a particular time and place and/or culture (e.g., killing disobedient children, Ex 21:15 is an example of applying the 5th commandment, Ex 20:12—Honor your parents.)
 - ⌘ Civil laws may very well be in effect with the return of the theocracy during the eschatological period.
 - ⌘ The largest body of civil laws are found in Deuteronomy 5-25
 - ⌘ As with ceremonial law, there is an underlying morality; to wit, the character of the Lord God Yahweh.



C. "Moral" – "apodictic⁴ internal inward natural" laws

- ⌘ Based on reflection of God and demand conformity to God's moral character.
- ⌘ Moral law is *summarized*, but not completed,⁵ in the Ten Commandments.
- ⌘ These laws are written on men's hearts (since we were created in God's image); thus, they are timeless and present from creation (Romans 2:14-15).
- ⌘ New covenant entails the ability to keep these laws (i.e., "grace") via Holy Spirit's indwelling. See Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 11:19-20, 36:27.

Thus, according to a "Continuity" interpretation, only *moral* laws apply today. Ceremonial laws, nonetheless, reflect the character of the Lord God, and as such have *moral* implications. For example, we are not to eat the flesh of an animal which has been strangled (Acts 15:29), based an injunction to avoid ingesting the blood of an animal (Leviticus 17:10-14). Blood has been decreed by the Lord God as an *icon* of life (not a symbol nor an artifact). The character of the Lord God holds that life is precious. Hence, His commemoration of "avoiding blood."



Civil laws, since they also reflect the character of the Lord God, also have similar *moral* implications. For example, a parapet⁶ is not required morally if people do not frequent their roofs to congregate. But if they do, then a parapet is *morally* required, regardless of building codes (see Deuteronomy 22:8) Jesus called believers to shout from the housetops (Matthew 10:27). Thus, if we "shout from the rooftops," there must be a parapet.

⁴Clearly established, socially primordial, an inherent part of the sentient human being.

⁵Consider the greatest commandment—Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all... and the second greatest, Love your neighbor as would be loved... Both are implied by the Ten, but not explicitly as Jesus the Christ taught and emulated.

⁶The photograph to the left is from a mission trip of mine to Alaska where we were assisting Habitat for Humanity. A common characteristic of buildings in the area are using the roof as living space. Note the parapets on said roofs.



Evidence for Continuity

1. Many ceremonial laws were fulfilled by and in Christ...

- ⌘ "It is finished." (τετέλεσται, te-té-less-tai, 5055) *What* is finished/completed? The sacrifice for atonement. Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45.
- ⌘ Purity of almost [c.f., Acts 15:29] all food. Mark 7:19; Luke 10:7; Acts 10:9-11.
- ⌘ The Jerusalem council determined ceremonial law does not apply to believers who do not have a pre-Christ history. See Acts 15:23-29 and Hebrews 9:10.

Later, of course, the church was continually faced with those who wanted parts of the ceremonial Law to be a condition for salvation, sanctification, and glorification.

- ✓ For example, many still are nervous about women preachers (even with Judge Deborah), and when was the last time you saw a woman baptizing someone? Also, still consider Nazarite vows as more holy.
- ✓ And, until recently, many defined the Law's prohibition against "inter-marriage" as prohibition of inter-racial marriage.

We love ceremonial law. We often, too often, couch good manners with moral upholstery. Being late becomes a moral dilemma. Clothing style, especially for church attendance, becomes a moral issue. How we conduct our ceremonies for immersion and communion have fueled lots of rancor. Our culture becomes our ceremonial touchstone for morality rather than the Lord God.

- ### 2. Many civil laws do not apply (consider the *de facto* approval of secular government, Romans 13; Luke 20:25; Matt 22:21). We are to pray for government leaders (even Nero) 1 Timothy 2:1-2.
- ### 3. Moral laws, however, are still binding (Matt 5:17, Rom 7:12, 1 Tim 1:8). All writers of the New Testament Scriptures speak approvingly of the Law.

4. Specific quotations of the Ten Commandments:

Matt 5:21 & 27, 15:4, 19:17-19

Mark 7:10, 10:19

Luke 18:20

Romans 7:7, 13:9

Ephesians 6:2-3

James 2:11

Application approves Ten Commandments:

Matthew 15:19

Romans 2:21-24

Colossians 3:20

1 Timothy 1:9-10

Advocates include:

Majority of church fathers

Majority of protestant reformers

Majority of evangelical theologians, confessions, creeds, and catechisms.



Key Objections to Continuity

1. Categories of ceremonial, civil, and moral are artificial; ergo, invalid.
 - ⌘ For pre-Christ believers, categories were irrelevant for all were relevant.
 - ⌘ Since it is difficult to tell which laws found in the Hebrew Scriptures are moral law, you are putting yourself over law rather than God over law.
 - ✓ Response: the use of artificial terms does not necessarily invalidate the construct (e.g., Trinity, rapture, poetry)
 - ✓ Response: these groupings are organized as such within Scripture.
2. Since it is difficult to tell which laws are moral law, you are putting yourself over law rather than God over law.
 - ✓ Response: identifying moral law is not a matter of authority, but a matter of interpretation (e.g., narrative regarding Ananias and his direction to Saul; Acts 9).

Distinctives of Moral Law in Scripture

1. Moral law is given theological justification upon its first disclosure; expected because it is a reflection of God's moral character. cf. Gen 9:5-6; Ex 20:1-2
2. Moral law often occurs with an exceptional manner of delivery – trumpet blasts, thunder in the mountains.
3. Moral law is present before the giving of the Mosaic law (e.g., Sabbath⁷ and tithing).
4. Moral law is re-iterated throughout Scripture (versus just the Pentateuch); prophets were not sent to call people to follow ceremonial law.
5. Moral law is possible for universal application.

THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL	
Discontinuity	Jesus <i>completed</i> the Law.
Hyper-Continuity	Jesus <i>continued</i> the Law.
Continuity	Jesus <i>clarified</i> the Law.

⁷And even the Sabbath? See <http://TheScoop.DThomasPorter.com/?p=256>



THE STRUCTURE/PURPOSES OF THE LAW

1. Civil
2. Ceremonial
3. Moral ... functions:
 - A. Social – **Chain** to restrain, provide order (e.g., murder = wrong)
 - B. Convictional – **Mirror** to set the bar to show your true condition; what you can and can not do.
 - C. Didactic – **Lamp** shows believers what to do, a schoolmaster (παιδαγωγόν; tutor) as it were.



“THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW IS TO CRUSH YOU SO YOU CAN BE ALL THINGS THROUGH **CHRIST** WHO πληρωω THE LAW.”

–dj+ntp

Submission to the Law builds a “get over yourself” mindset.
“It is inherently sanctifying.” It forces you to deal with yourself.



THE LAW AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER LAWS

The Moral Paradox Christ Believers: *What does one do when two laws conflict?*

The Problem "While the Law is a reflection of Gods' moral character, and is not in conflict with the Gospel, some have suggested that laws themselves conflict. If so, we must have a means for resolving conflicts to have a viable system of [Christian] ethics." Such an alternative is necessary if the system affirms *more* than one moral norm.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Law says premarital intercourse is sin, an abomination to the Lord God, yet not all premarital intercourse is sin. How can this be?

When the Laws within The Law Conflict – Six Alternatives

- 1) **Antinomianism** "no/anti/against law"
 - a) There are no universal or absolute moral norms; moral codes are simple social constructions reflecting social agreement and/or consensus.
 - b) With there no norms, then by "definition," there is no conflict.
 - c) Practically speaking, antinomianism is the most common—Nietzsche most famous proponent; others include Julian Huxley, and Jean-Paul Sartre (of "No Exit" fame).
 - d) Problems with antinomianism –
 - ⌘ Does not correspond to reality; by nature it is *de facto* self-defeating.
 - ⌘ Impractical—humans need absolutes to exist.
 - ⌘ Creates anarchy (if actually pursued); by nature we like order.⁸
 - ⌘ Irrational and illogical to sentient folk since two contradictory positions can not be correct; to wit, "There are no absolutes" is an absolute.
 - ⌘ Scripture contains many axiomatic norms.
- 2) **Generalism**
 - a) No universal norms or absolutes exist, only "general principles (good ideas)." Thus, relative applications require continual assessment of what is a "good" idea.
 - b) Ergo, conflict between moral norms can not arise—simply "pick a principle."
 - c) Principal proponents include John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham.

⁸We'll even create "it" (a perception of order) even if it is not warranted by the phenomenon in question. Organization (creating order) seems to be a primordial part of human nature.



Problems –

- ⌘ Reducible easily to antinomianism because there are no universal moral norms
- ⌘ Ergo, the same critiques of antinomianism apply.
- ⌘ Consider for example ... If one were to kill a pregnant woman on the way to an abortion clinic to have her pregnancy terminated: What law has been broken? Yet, a 15 year old needs parental approval for an aspirin [or a tattoo in Florida], but not an abortion.

3) **Situationalism**

- a) There is only one universal and absolute norm (e.g., "Do what is the most loving thing" or "Do what is the most good for the most people.")
- b) Thus moral norm conflict cannot occur because there is only *one* norm.
- c) The "right" thing, however, will vary as a function of agent and situation; to wit,
 - Two different people in identical situations could make different [and ethical] choices and *both* be correct. For example, if I need bread for my children, and you need to protect your bread from my theft, both of us would be moral to use violence to keep/get bread.
- d) Or, one person in two different situations across time makes different choices and can be [ethically] correct in *both* situations. For example, one day I have bread and I choose to keep it for my children. Another day, I keep my bread because it is my bread.
- e) Classic proponent – Joseph Fletcher; others include neo-orthodox Christians (e.g., Bultman, Brunner).
- f) Problem – "You" decide what is the proper way to behave/act/be.
 - ⌘ For example, if "compassion" is your one universal, then subjectivity comes to bear with a vengeance.
 - ⌘ Even though claiming one moral norm, this norm changes with situation and agent; it is not really a moral normative.
 - ⌘ Reduces, thus and again, to antinomianism since it ultimately denies the existence of moral absolutes.

Scripture reveals that loving others is difficult, if not impossible—cf. Romans 3:10-18; 7:18-19 ...

"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no



one who does good, not even one." "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know." "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

–Romans 3:10-18

"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing." –Romans 7:18-19

➤ Thus, the same critiques of antinomianism apply.

NOTA BENE:

The remaining 3 approaches, *Conflicting Absolutism*, *Graded Absolutism*, and *Non-Conflicting Absolutism* are considered *epistemologically* compatible with Christianity. Considerable variance across these last 3, however, suggest differentiated acceptance.

4) **Conflicting Absolutism**

- a) Also known as "Ideal Absolutism" "Absolutism" or "Tragic Morality."
- b) Holds there are *many* universal and moral norms.
- c) Moral norms can and do conflict because we live in a fallen, depraved world (e.g., Rahab;⁹ Shiprah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives of Egypt¹⁰).

⁹So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land." But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them." (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.)

– Joshua 2:3-6; see also Joshua 6:17-25, Matthew 1:5, Hebrews 11:31, and James 2:25.

¹⁰The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiprah and Puah, "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?"

The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive."

So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every boy that is born [*to the Hebrews*] you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live." – Exodus 1:15-22.



- d) Ergo, we are sometimes forced to break moral norms (e.g., “choose between the lesser of two evils”). We have then sinned and must seek repentance and forgiveness.
- e) Key advocates include: Helmut Thielicke, Dietrich Bonhoffer, Martin Luther, JI Packer, Erwin Lutzer, John Warrick Montgomery.
- f) Biblical evidence includes ...
- i) Psalm 51:5— “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”
 - ii) Romans 3:23— “ ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- g) Arguments in favor include:
- i) Emphasizes God’s holiness (by focusing on moral absolutes) and human sinfulness (by focusing on human’s need for repentance for breaking moral absolutes).
 - ii) Emphasizes fullness of creation by rooting corruption in sinfulness of people rather than by design of God.
- h) Problems of Conflicting Absolutism include:
- If the Law is a reflection of God’s character, then conflicts within His Law have created a dysfunctional view of God’s unanimity.
 - Neither useful, nor pragmatic for it lends little instruction about what to do to avoid sin.
 - If there are indeed “evils that are lesser,” then subjectivity—[the enemy of any ethical system, especially a Godly/Christian ethic]—becomes the operating force.
 - God says to “be holy” yet puts us in situations where we cannot do anything but an unholy act—sin; i.e., do evil.
 - Confuses the reality of the Incarnation and obfuscates orthodoxy regarding same; cf., Hebrews 2:14-18
- “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for [or *and that he might turn aside God’s wrath, taking away*] the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” –Hebrews 2:14-18



Hebrews 4:15

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin." -Hebrews 4:15

It seems to make Jesus' incarnation either less authentic or artificially engineered since Jesus never sinned.

- Seems to make God unjust if He allows mankind to exist in an environment in which he has to commit evil, yet still holds him accountable for "necessary" transgressions;¹¹ cf., I Corinthians 10:13 ...

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

II Peter 1:3 and 2:9 ...

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."

"... if this is so [the rescue of Lot from unrighteous men], then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment [Or *unrighteous for punishment until the day of judgment*]."

- Seems to minimize personal holiness since it results in a moral "duty" to sin on some occasions. Consider, for instance, 1 Peter 1:14-16:
"As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."
- In a formal sense, God gave His Law (i.e., His absolutes) to humanity after it had fallen; therefore, we ought to expect that it is possible to keep the Law (cf., Matthew 5:48, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.")
- Tenuous view of the Law's nature—there is no conflict in God's character.

¹¹How is this any more of a problem than the "unjust" God who allows mankind to suffer—from phenomena over which he has no control and/or seems unrelated to sin, his or others? Hurricanes? Tornadoes? Brake failures?



- Overly simplistic—doesn't look for a way out of sin; in fact, one could argue that it encourages sin because it reinforces avoidance of the hard work of working it out; cf., Philippians 2:12-13,
"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."
- Anthropocentric—puts human in charge of deciding which laws to break and when two laws are apparently in conflict.

5) Graded Absolutism

- Also known as Contextual Absolutism, Hierarchicalism, Qualified Absolutism
- Holds there are many universal and absolute moral norms.
- Moral norms can and do conflict.
- Moral norms can be and are arranged in a hierarchy of merit. It is not, therefore, sinful to break a moral norm in order to keep a higher moral norm. It is "just" a matter of choosing the proper "greater good."
- Biblical evidence includes ...
 - Matthew 5:19 "to the *least* of these commandments ..."
 - Matthew 22:38 "this is the *first* and *greatest* commandment ..."
 - Matthew 23:23 "the *weightier* matters of the Law ..."
 - John 19:11 "the *greater* sin ..."
 - I Corinthians 13:13 "the *greatest* of these is love ..."
- General arguments in favor include ...
 - Apparent unavoidability (e.g., Rahab, Abraham & Isaac, Hebrew mid-wives, Samuel's anointing of David, David as king—God's instruction to lie and go to worship. Ahab—angel says he will be a lying spirit.
 - Thus, the "Jews in the basement" scenario is resolved by committing the lesser sin—lying—to avoid a worse sin, i.e., permitting innocent people to be murdered.



- g) Key proponents include Norman Geisler (inventor?), also John Jefferson Davis, John Feinberg, Paul Feinberg.
- h) Problems with *Graded Absolutism*
- ⌘ *Who* sets the hierarchy and how are we to know it? [Porter: Why not base it on what gives honor and glory to God?]
 - ⌘ In practice, Graded Absolutism may be absolutism in disguise (i.e., one does not have to confess "sin?").
 - ⌘ Scripture indicates a hierarchy, but do these Scriptures prove there is a conflict indeed between "heavier" and "lighter" matters?
 - ⌘ And, there is no evidence that the Lord sanctions breaking lower norms.
 - Prove the hierarchy empirically.
 - Show it is acceptable to break the "lower" moral norms.
 - Find an empirical basis for ordering the hierarchy.
 - ⌘ Appears to define sin as non-sin when an absolute is broken in a given situation—trivializes "absolutes."
 - ⌘ Makes Graded Absolutism resemble situationalism/situational ethics with the one moral norm being "Do the right thing."
 - ⌘ It has a tenuous view of the nature of Law—ceases to be an acceptable view of God's character.
 - ⌘ Anthropocentric in that the moral agent becomes the focus of the ethical situation rather than the Law giver.
- 6) **Non-Conflicting Absolutism**
- a) Also known as "Unqualified Absolutism," "Case Analysis," "Casuistical Divinity"
 - b) Conflict cannot occur because conflict is mere illusion, "only apparent." That is, there will never be a case having to break one moral norm in order to keep another.
 - c) Results from human misperception of circumstances, or [more likely] human misunderstanding of moral norms.¹²

¹²We could also attribute some of this "misperception" to Porter's First Law of Human Behavior: "*Sentient human beings see, believe, remember, and do what we want to see, believe, remember, and do.*" Note also a critical corollary—to wit, Porter's Second Law of Human Behavior: When we manifest the First Law, we must rely ever so less on our experience and ever so more on the empirical world around us. Thus, for the scholar, it means searching for evidence not to confirm our experience, but to disconfirm. For the Christian, it means searching the Scriptures not to confirm our hypotheses, but to affirm God's evidence—regardless of where it leads. It is this latter "regardless" that trips most of us—again, because of Porter's First Law.



d) Commonly known advocates include John Murray, Kant, Augustine, Charles Hodge, John Frame, and most ethicists in the Protestant tradition. Most Roman Catholic ethicists as well, and orthodox Judaism.

e) General Arguments ...

- Moral norms are rooted in God's character—an absolute, non-contradictory character; therefore, we ought to expect that moral norms likewise will be absolute and non-contradictory.
- Entire Biblical record speaks to conflict between believers and moral norms—not conflict between moral norms themselves. [Can you think of an exception?]
- Practically speaking, it minimizes the moral agent—obey, maximize the Law-giver, minimize the Law-follower. When we obey, we are focused on obedience, not other stuff.

f) Biblical evidence includes ...

1. Matthew 5:48— "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
2. I Corinthians 10:13— "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."
3. Hebrews 4:15— "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin."
4. II Peter 2:9— "... if this is so [the rescue of Lot from unrighteous men], then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment [Or *unrighteous for punishment until the day of judgment*]."

"God is not against us; we are against us. With Holy Spirit, we can prevail; if we do not, we are broken, not God." –djones (SEBTS)



APPLYING NON-CONFLICTING ABSOLUTISM



"It is not always wrong to lie." Shiprah and Puah are to be understood not just by *what* they did, but *why*. By speaking untruth, they protected God's people and did so, not to protect themselves, but for God's glory, specifically to honor God. Just as we do not assume that premarital sex is wrong without examining the "why," (e.g., rape and victimizing), we cannot automatically call speaking an untruth "sin." But, just like praying to be seen of men

is evil, speaking an untruth to benefit ourselves, rather than honor God, is evil. The heart is the key.

The internal workings of the heart tell the real motive behind the act; character, goals, and consequences—all count. Motives of Shiprah & Puah: "*And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.*" (Exodus 1:21)

Ergo, "lying" is not inherently sinful anymore than any behavior/act is inherently sinful.

Problems with Non-Conflicting Absolutism

- Real-life experiences seem to testify that conflict does occur; e.g., it is difficult not to feel conflicted after killing the burglar, even if it was not evil to do so. Perhaps, the conflict is not between killing or not killing, but our inner conflicts about our true motives. [Remember Augustine's pear thievery.]
- Biblical examples seem to testify that conflicts occur ...
 1. Samson's divinely approved suicide, Judges 16:30
 2. Abraham's offering of his son Isaac, Genesis 22:1-19
 3. Shiprah and Puah, the Hebrew mid-wives in Egypt, Exodus 1:15-20
 4. Rahab's lie to the king of the city (Joshua 2:1-14; James 2:25)
 5. Daniel's disobedience to the governing authorities (Daniel 3:8-30)
 6. Jesus the Christ's misdirection regarding His goodness (Luke 18:19; Mark 10:18)
 7. Apostles' disobedience to governing authorities (Acts 4:13-22)
- Non-conflicting absolutism appears to place value on rules rather than human beings.

[Yes, God's Law is more important than human beings, given Character, Goals & Conduct.]

Nota Bene:

Augustine called the Godly soldier who kills a "mournful warrior."



SPECIAL REVELATION: THE LAW AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO MANKIND

Essential problem: How does the Law relate to us? How do we use the Law in everyday life?

Christian ethics is the **study and application** of morals **prescribed in God's word** that pertains to the **conduct, character, and goals required** of one who professes to be in a redemptive relationship with the Lord Jesus the Christ.

So far then, the Law itself is a reflection of God's character (nature), and it is not at odds with the Gospel (its relevancy), and can not conflict (coherency). Yet, how do we use the Law in everyday life?

Key Notion↓

The purpose of life is ... To glorify God. What then is "God's glory?" The totality of His being; therefore, we glorify God by...

- Reflecting Him, obeying His commandments—we imitate God:
 - Ephesians 5:1-2— "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."
 - I Corinthians 11:7—"A man ought not to cover his head,¹³ since he is the image and glory of God ..."
 - II Corinthians 2:15—"For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing."
 - BTW: Roles ≠ worth as in husbands glorifying God and wives glorifying husbands.
- Scripture reveals that the Christian life is not ultimately about law-keeping—law-keeping is the *means* to the prime objective: glorifying God ...
 - God created the world for His glory:
 - ⌘ Proverbs 16:4—"The LORD works out everything for his own ends—even the wicked for a day of disaster."

¹³I Corinthians 11:4-7 (NIV) has an alternative translation (in the footnotes), later removed in 2003 by the NIV translation committee, which reads, "Every man who prays or prophesies with long hair dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with no covering of hair on her head dishonors her head—she is just like one of the 'shorn women.' If a woman has no covering, let her be for now with short hair, but since it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair shorn or shaved, she should grow it again. A man ought not to have long hair."



⌘ Colossians 1:16—“For by Him [referring to the Christ] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.”

➤ God elected His people before the foundation of the world for His glory; see Ephesians 1:5-6—“ In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ”

➤ God created humankind for His glory; see Isaiah 43:7, 10—
“...everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for *my* glory, whom I formed and made.”

[And our purpose?]

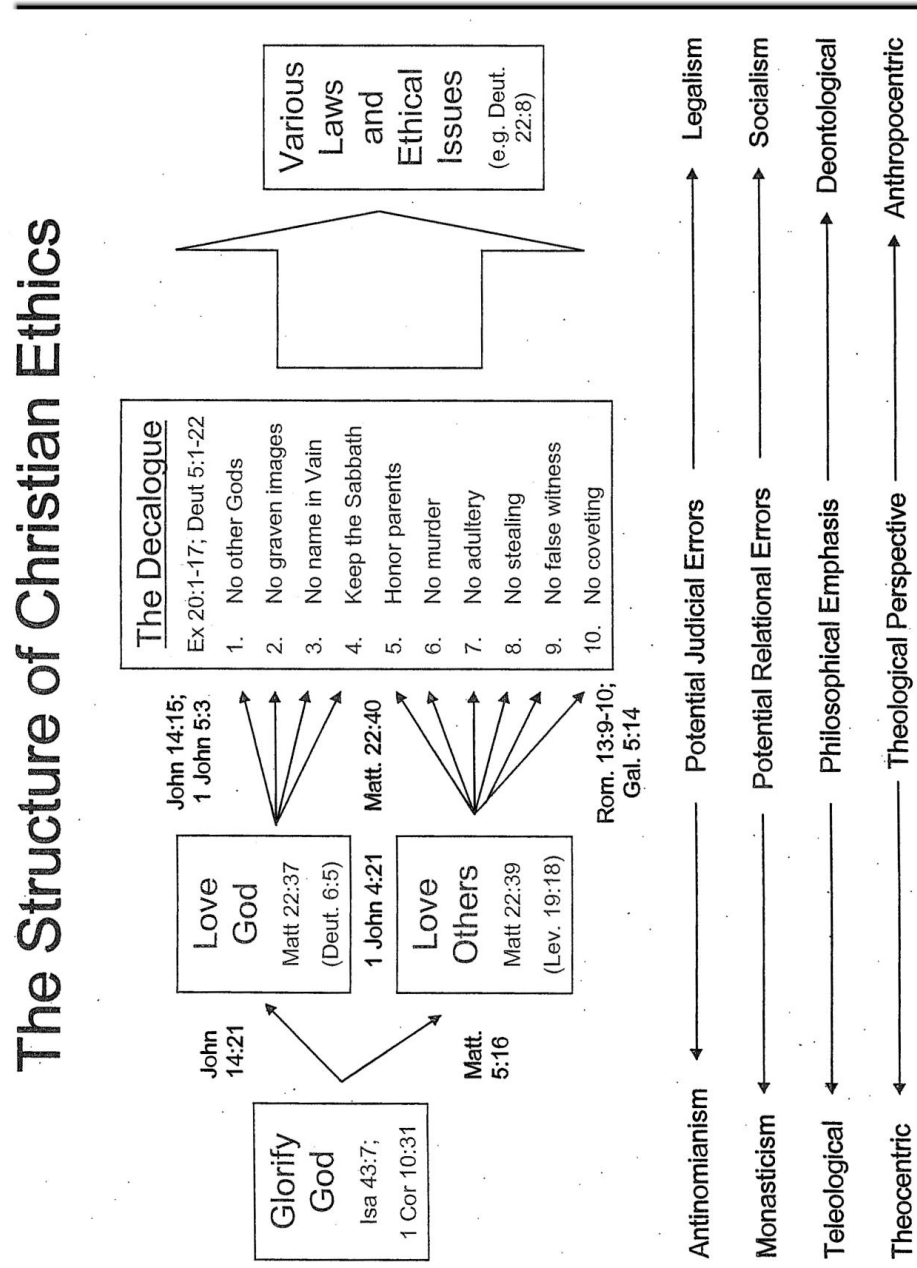
“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He.”

- God delivered Israel for His glory; Psalm 106:7-8—“When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to your miracles; they did not remember your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for his name's sake, to make his mighty power known.”
- God restored Israel after exile (Isaiah 48:9-11). God didn't save you for you for but for His sake. It's not about you; it's about Him.
- God sent His Son into the world that Gentiles might glorify His Son (cf. John 16:14, “He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.”).
- God commands His people to do all things for His glory (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Peter 4:11).
- God will send His Son a second time to receive the glory due Him (cf. Philippians 2:9-10, 2 Thessalonians 1:10).
- In the end times, God will fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory (cf. Hebrews 2:14).

It's not about you.



THE STRUCTURE OF THE LAW





Another View of the Law's Structure

C.S. Lewis' Diagram of Ethical Structure

