

Smoky Mountain Reflections #172

Biblical Christians DO NOT MURDER GAY PEOPLE!!! The various commands issued by God throughout scripture can be broken into three classes: **ceremonial, civil & moral**. These distinctions are not enumerated for us in scripture, but are very helpful in applying God's law to our lives. We can use God's word to untangle these just like we use it to provide a clear understanding of the Holy Trinity. These distinctions are important to understand, not only because they help us to properly apply God's will in our lives and to love God and our neighbor in accord with his will, but because Christ himself tells us in Matthew 5:17, "***Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.***" Let's look at these three categories, and define and apply them.

The clearest category is the **ceremonial** law. Old Testament religious regulations fall in this class. These are the commands which deal with the temple or tabernacle and their tools and accoutrements, priests and their garments, ceremonies, feasts and festivals, and dietary and clothing restrictions. Ceremonial laws are called "hukkim" or "chuqqah" in Hebrew, which literally means "custom of the nation"; these words are often translated as "statute". These laws have the purpose of pointing to the coming messiah, and were fulfilled in him. For example, the shedding of Christ's innocent blood for the atonement of sins on Good Friday fulfills what all the temple sacrifices before him pointed to. Many books are filled with clear explanations of how "customs of the nation" were fulfilled in Christ. Even Jewish scholars (who of course do not see Christ as a fulfillment) agree with the distinction between ceremonial and moral laws.

The **civil** or **legal** distinction is not accepted by Jewish scholars, and has mixed reception within Christendom. However, the majority of Christian scholars agree that such a class is helpful. Civil laws are those which applied directly and exclusively to the Ancient nation of Israel from 1446 BC to 586 BC, while remnants of that nation-state existed in exile. When they returned from exile they were never more than a vassal state. These were laws regarding issues including slavery, punishment of multiple forms of sin (by stoning), and others. Similarly, to ceremonial law, they functioned to point forward to the Christ, and to keep intact and distinct the people from whom and for which he was promised to be born. The kingdom for which those civil laws were written no longer exists, however, and today's nation-state of Israel, being a modern construct of the UN, cannot legitimately claim a real connection to the kingdom that fell in 586 BC.

Since the civil and ceremonial laws functioned to point to, prepare for, and announce the coming Messiah, then the purpose for which God established those laws has come to pass, so it would be a denial of Christ as the Messiah to continue adhering to those types of laws. One does not put up posters and hand out flyers for an event that has already passed. In accord with biblical principle, Christians *have never* and *should never* resort to vigilante mob justice, which (apart from God's word to the Israelites in the time and place just mentioned) is what stoning is. We trust God to execute civil judgment through the authorities he puts in place, and he calls us to be good citizens of whatever worldly kingdom we live in.

Finally, **moral** laws. These are the laws of God which scripture speaks of in Matthew 5:18 as not passing away. The 10 commandments are a clear example of these timeless moral laws. To be sure, there are laws within the two previously mentioned categories which carry moral content that still applies. Let's look at commandments 3 through 6 for some clarification on this.

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" actually fits in all three categories, but because the ceremonial and civil natures of the law were fulfilled in Christ, we are free to worship on any day (1 in 7 is the moral element). For 2000 years, Christians have chosen the day of Easter to be their primary day of worship; some must work on Sundays, but they have six other days to make use of for spiritual and physical nourishment and rest. "Honor your father and mother" speaks to all authority in our lives, though when the law of a community violates God's, Christians must follow God rather than man (Acts 5:29). "You shall not murder" does not prohibit all killing; war and capital punishment can justify the taking of life by a government. Murder is the taking of innocent life. Gunning down an abortion doctor or strangers in a gay bar fits this definition and is therefore murder. The sixth commandment makes clear that sex belongs in marriage, which is between one man and one woman. This is an undeniable biblical principle that Christians are called to speak the truth in love about.

Speaking the truth in love, incidentally, does not include shooting, yelling at, or shunning anyone. It means being kind and loving toward one's neighbor, and all people are your neighbors; tell them that violating

God's moral law is not good for them, and that Jesus paid the price for all our violations, by perfectly fulfilling the moral law on our behalf. So eternity is sure for those who do not reject this truth. Then, continue to live out your faith in their presence, being kind, generous, friendly, and hospitable. That is what the "love your neighbor" part of the moral law looks like. Jesus does not force himself on anyone and neither should we.

In Christ,
Pastor Portier

For further reading on this topic I recommend the following links

<http://www.gotquestions.org/ceremonial-law.html>

<http://www.christian.org.uk/wp-content/downloads/the-threefold-division-of-the-law.pdf>

<http://crossexamined.org/cherry-picking-the-bible-are-christians-expected-to-follow-the-levitical-laws/>

<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/LutherMoses.htm>