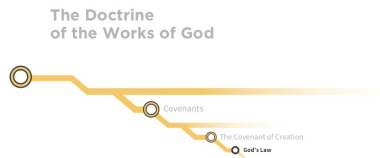


God's Law



God's law refers to the system of rules that reflect God's character, are built into the created order, and are revealed in Scripture.

"Law" has many referents in Scripture. It can refer to the natural law that enables even those without God's written law to know right and wrong (Rom 2:14–15). It can refer to what Christians call the Old Testament (Jesus cites a psalm as from the "law" in John 10:34). It can refer to the Pentateuch as distinct from the rest of the Old Testament (Luke 24:44). Often, it refers to the Mosaic covenant (Rom 6:14; 1 Cor 16:20–21). It can refer to the law of Christ—the new-covenant law written on the heart (Jer 31:31; 1 Cor 16:20–21; cf. 2 Cor 3:3–6). It can be used generally of all of God's instruction throughout Scripture (Ps 1:2).

Equivalent terms can be used to indicate his word, which establishes order in the natural world (Ps 147:15).

Voluntarists have argued that God's law is determined by God's mere choice. If God had decreed murder to be lawful and saving life to be unlawful, he could have done so. It is better, however, to root the law of God in the character of God. Murder is wrong because of who God is and because humans bear his image.

God's character is reflected in his creation: the law that God built into that creation is not arbitrary. This creational law includes both laws of nature and what some have termed "creational norms" (cf. Ps 147:15–20). Creational norms include moral norms, but they extend beyond them to include norms for all of life, even agriculture (cf. Isa 28:24–29). To discern creational norms, wisdom is needed (Prov 8:22–30). Thus, there is a close connection between law and wisdom.

The Mosaic law was, in part, the application of creational norms to Israel's particular time and place. It also included specific laws and ceremonies that pointed forward to Christ or that served a pedagogical

function. Some of the applications of creational norms in the Mosaic law are no longer fitting for [Christians](#), who live in a different time and place (e.g., [Lev 19:9–10](#)). Other parts of the Mosaic law state more directly applicable, abiding creational norms (e.g., [Lev 19:11–18](#)).

Traditionally theologians have said that the “moral” law is still valid, while the “ceremonial” and “civil” laws are no longer binding. Other theologians would frame the matter differently: Christians are not bound by the Mosaic covenant at all because they are under the new covenant instead. However, in this view, the law of the new covenant has clear continuity with the law of the Mosaic covenant because both are tied to creational norms.

However the issue is framed, the application of creational norms that the Mosaic law made for Israel must now be done by Christians themselves. They have the broad statements of creational norms in the Mosaic law, the example of how God applied creational norms for Israel, and the indwelling [Holy Spirit](#) to guide them in their application. Once again, the close connection between wisdom and law is appar-

ent.

These discussions are complicated by the various uses of the term “law” and by the disagreement over how the Mosaic and new covenants relate. Nonetheless, one thing is clear: God’s people should love God’s law because it reflects who he is. It is for this reason that the whole law can be summed up in terms of [loving God and loving those who bear his image](#) ([Matt 22:34–40](#)). To [sin](#), therefore, is to both break God’s law and to fail to love God and others.

Sin has judicial consequences. In addition, creation itself presses back against violations of God’s law. It is impossible to live contrary to God’s law without consequences. Hence, the flourishing person is the one who delights in and meditates on God’s law day and night, thinking about how it applies to every aspect of life.

Passages

KEY VERSES

[Ex 20:1–17](#); [Mt 22:34–40](#); [Mt 7:12](#); [Ps 147:15–20](#) (Creational norms and moral law are both part of God’s overall law.); [Pr 8:22–30](#) (Creational

norms and wisdom are embedded in the creation order.); [Is 28:24–29](#) (Norms for mundane tasks, like farming, are built into the way God created his world to work.); [Mt 5:17–20](#); [Heb 7:11–22](#); [1 Co 9:20–21](#); [2 Co 3:3–6](#); [Ro 6:14](#); [Ga 3:19–24](#); [Ro 5:20](#); [Ro 7](#); [Ro 9:30–10:9](#); [Ro 2:12–16](#); [Ro 13:8–10](#)