

Responding to the New Atheists' attacks on the God of the Old Testament-29: The Mosaic Law-2 (The Mosaic Law was never God's perfect ideal)

While the Mosaic Law (ML) was the ideal given the state of the Jews, it was never God's perfect ideal for mankind. In other words, the (ML) was perfect in one way, yet not perfect in another: it was perfect for Israel in that stage of her history, but it does not reflect God's perfect antecedent will (His perfect will apart from the circumstances of Israel's history). The (ML) was inferior and provisional. I realize that many Christians, especially the Theonomists in the Reformed camp, will tend to vibrate at any notion that the Mosaic Law is not perfect because as they point out, "God's Law comes from His very unchanging nature," and "the Bible says the (ML) is perfect, holy, righteous, good, and is never to be annulled."

Psalm 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

Romans 7:12 So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

However, listen to the Lord Jesus Christ's explicit statement regarding God's perfect ideal for mankind as contrasted with His ideal for Israel expressed in the Mosaic Law.

Matthew 19:8 He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.

We could apply this passage to many problematic structures within the ancient Near Eastern context: e.g., "Because of the hardness of your heart Moses permitted *slavery* and *patriarchy* and a number of other fallen social arrangements." *But from the beginning it has not been this way!*

The point here is that God in His marvelous matchless grace met Israel partway. They were a very crude and uncultured people. And while the (ML) makes a number of moral improvements, it did so without completely overhauling ancient Near Eastern social structures and assumptions. God "works with" Israel as He finds her. He meets His people where they are while seeking to show them a higher ideal in the context of ancient Near Eastern life. That's grace! If human beings are to be treated as real human beings who possess the power of choice, then "the better way" must often come gradually. Otherwise, they will exercise their freedom of choice and turn away from what they do not understand. The law was good, but it was temporary measure that was less than ideal. It was only ideal in that it was exactly what Israel needed at the time.

So when atheists like Christopher Hitchens react to the Mosaic laws by saying that we are not bound by any of the (ML) because it was put together by crude, uncultured animals, he is at least pointing in the right direction—though we know that the (ML) is from God and the Israelites, while very crude as they came out of Egypt without any law, were still not animals. Hitchens, at least, understands more than Christian Theonomists who insist that the (ML) is God's perfect will and is to be obeyed by all people for all of time. However, as of yet, I have not seen any of them proposing that we Christians should stone our rebellious children, although I have seen them attempt to explain away Deuteronomy 21:18-21 in an attempt to teach that every government should still be under God's perfect Mosaic Law.

Deuteronomy 21:18-21: "If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, 19 then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his home town. 20 "And they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.' 21 "Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear of it and fear.

Capital punishment for incorrigible children was the ideal, the perfect punishment, for Israel given their crude and barbaric character as slaves coming out of Egypt. But that is not the perfect ideal of God for all people for all times. Thank God we live in an age of grace! Thank God we now to live under Natural Law instead of under some Christian Theonomist enforcing capital punishment for working on Saturday and for rebellious teenagers. It is unfortunate that Americans are so philosophically ignorant that they do not even know the nature or the beauty of Natural Law even though our forefathers understood it; by the way it is in the first line of our country's birth certificate, The Declaration of Independence:

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

Thank God that our country was founded on Natural Law and not on the (ML) that was designed for a barbarous people who had never experienced freedom. They had been in slavery for hundreds of years. What was perfect for the hardened Israelites (like the allowance of polygamy) is not God's perfect will as reflected in original creation of Adam and Eve or reflected in Natural Law. God just accommodated them until He could move them along. The Mosaic Law is not the perfect ideal!

In Him,

Pastor Don