

Responding to the New Atheists' attacks on the God of the Old Testament-34: The Mosaic Law-7 The Superiority of the Mosaic Law Over Pagan Religions-2

Before examining the various Mosaic Laws which are often characterized as backward and draconian, I wish to compare it to what could be argued as the greatest *ancient humanly devised* empire, the Roman Empire. My goal is to show the superiority of the Mosaic Law in the area of religion/spirituality, economics, slavery, and work.

The Mosaic Law is commonly portrayed as a cruel religious system filled with meaningless rituals. This is patently false. The Mosaic Law was a system designed for spiritual enlightenment. It is filled with lessons and pictures on the nature of God and His grace—like the Holy of Holies which depicted the holiness of God and His grace in substitutionary atonement. The Mosaic Law was filled with Christological lessons to advance man in understanding of God and the rule of law.

In contrast to the Mosaic Law, the Roman Empire was a system filled with all kinds of rituals without any enlightenment. It was anti-intellectual to the core. It did not emphasize knowledge, learning, understanding or teaching. Like liberal wings of the “Christian church,” the Roman religions emphasized “orthopraxy”—doing good, rather than orthodoxy, correct doctrine. This “good,” of course, was what was reflected and supported in the general Greek and Roman ethos. We also see this in doctrineless Christianity which supports the ethos of the growing culture in our country regarding homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Once a believer gets away from doctrine, he will default to whatever the common culture is. This happened in Hitler’s Germany and it is happening today, the only difference is found in the disparate cultural ethos.

Because of the variety of gods in Rome, some historians have mistakenly concluded that Rome enjoyed religious liberty. But the command of the Twelve Tables (*c.* 450 B.C.), as well as the persecution of religious dissenters, makes it clear that religious liberty was not a feature of Roman society: “Let no one have gods on his own, neither new ones nor strange ones, but only those instituted by the State.”

In the second century after Christ, the pagan jurist Julius Paulus reported a contemporary legal decree:

Of those people who introduce new religions with unknown customs or methods by which the minds of men could be disturbed, those of the upper classes shall be deported, those of the lower classes shall be put to death.

Of course, the only religions permitted in Rome were those licensed and approved by the State.

Both the Greek *poleis* and the Roman Empire were totalitarian church-states. For the ancient as well as the medieval pagans, statecraft was soulcraft. Consider what Pliny the Younger wrote in A.D. 111:

This is the plan which I have adopted in the case of those Christians who have been brought before me. I ask them whether they are Christians; if they say yes, then I repeat the question a second and a third time, warning them of the penalties it entails, and if they still persist, I order them to be taken away to prison. For I do not doubt, whatever the character of the crime may be which they confess, their pertinacity and inflexible obstinacy certainly ought to be punished . . .

In Rome, “pertinacity” was a crime punishable by indefinite incarceration.

Pliny explained what his subjects were required to do in order to regain their freedom:

Those who denied that they were or had been Christians and called upon the gods in the usual formula, reciting the words after me, those who offered incense and wine before the Emperor’s image, which I had given orders to be brought forward for this purpose, together with the statutes of the deities—all such I considered should be discharged, and especially as they cursed the name of Christ, which, it be said, those who really Christians cannot be induced to do.

In Rome, as in Athens, one could escape punishment by worshipping the gods. In one case in which some persons had anonymously accused their neighbors of being Christians, Pliny

thought it more necessary . . . to find out what truth there was in these statements of accusation by submitting to women, who were called deaconesses, to the torture . . . Many persons of all ages, and of both sexes alike, are being brought into peril of their lives by their accusers, and the process of inquisition and punishment will go on. For the contagion of this superstition [Christianity] has spread not only through the free cities, but into the villages and rural districts, and it seems to me that it can be checked and set right. It is beyond doubt that the pagan temples, which have been almost deserted, are beginning again to be thronged with worshipers, that the sacred rites which for a long time have been allowed to lapse are now being renewed, and that the food of the sacrificial victims is once more finding a sale.

Pliny was pleased to report that his methods of torture and imprisonment were encouraging people to worship the gods, and that the Roman temples were growing again. Coercion was a favorite method of achieving growth in religion. This *torch* along with many Roman rituals were then passed on the Roman Catholic State Church in contrast to true Christianity’s separation of church and state which is taught in the New Testament:

Romans 13:1-7, Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil. 5 Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience ' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

1 Peter 2:13-14, Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

In his letter to Trajan, Pliny emphasized that worshipping the Emperor is the way to avoid punishment. Tiberius succeeded Augustus as Emperor in A.D. 14. Here are a few excerpts from a letter on instructions in the proper rituals of the Imperial cult:

Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the god Augustus, *pontifex maximus*, He should place an image of the god Augustus Caesar the father on the first chair, one of Julia Augusta on the second from the right, and one of Tiberius Caesar Augustus on the third . . . Let a table for sacrifices be set by him in this middle of the theatre and an incense burner be placed there, and let the representatives and all magistrates offer sacrifices . . . Let him conduct the festival on the first day in honor of the god Augustus the Savior and Liberator, son of the god Caesar [Ramsey MacMullen and Eugene Lane, editors, *Paganism and Christianity 100-425 C.E.*, 1992, 74-5].

The bottom line is that in man's greatest *ancient* empire, the Roman Empire which existed over one thousand years after the Mosaic Law, worship of the State, in the person of the divine Emperor, was not an option. It was forced worship of man as a god. It has been estimated that over 100,000 Christians were killed in the first few centuries of the Roman Empire. It is estimated that more than 200 million Christians throughout the world do not enjoy the freedoms that we enjoy in America (persecuted or denied basic human rights).

Of course, the Mosaic Law was also a religious-state system which included capital punishment for religious matters. I will address these laws in detail as we go through this study. The point that needs to be kept in mind is that under the Mosaic system the laws were in writing for a given people for a given time, not arbitrary, and everyone knew what the laws were. *More importantly, the Mosaic Law was far superior to any ancient system because it was a personal covenant between God and His people for enlightened worship; it was not the worship of man, ruler or not—it was about Esse who brought His people out of slavery unlike a Caesar to enslave them temporally and spiritually.* As for me and my house, I would much rather have lived under the Mosaic Law and learn of the coming Messiah than under the *dictates and worship* of any

man, be he a Caesar or not? It should be noted, also, that Christ came and brought a new system of separation of church and state—which is far better! Christ brought man along with a fuller revelation of God that made it possible for man to understand both natural law (and thus separation of church and state) as well as give man the freedom of grace in a relationship with Him. Most importantly, Christ solved the problem of sin, a problem that no human empire has even claimed to be able to do.

Galatians 3:24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

In Him,

Pastor Don