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Were Jesus' Commands in the Gospels for the Jews Only or for the Present-Day Body of Christ?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether Jesus' commands in the Gospels were for the Jews only or for the present-day body of Christ, whether God chose to be illiterate when he came to earth, and whether we should only pray for the specific items mentioned in the Lord's Prayer.

- * Were Jesus' commands in the Gospels only to be followed by the Jews back then and not the present-day body of Christ?
- * Why do you think God chose to be illiterate when he came to earth?
- * When Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer, did he mean we should only pray that way and not ask for any other specific items?

Transcript

This is Amy Hall and Greg Koukl and welcome to the hashtag SDRask Podcast. Now, Greg... No, Amy... We've got some questions about... Well, I'll just get going. I thought you were going to chastise me because I did something bad.

No. You would have said no, Gregory. It's my mom.

Okay, what do we got? Alright, this first question is... My question comes from David Crockett. Was Jesus imperatives... David Crockett as in Davey? I guess so. David Crockett.

Was Jesus imperatives in the Gospels only to be followed by the Jews and not for the present-day body of Christ? Well, that kind of depends because Jesus was living in an Old Testament economy and therefore he was faithful to the details of that economy until the economy changed. And maybe one exception would have been the Cushroot, which is the dietary laws, where he declares all laws clean. And where, on the one hand, you see in the Sermon in the Mount, him clarifying the details of, say, some of the moral law, making it more extreme than what it appeared to many people.

It's not just what you do, but how you think about things and what you say to people that is involved in the moral equation. But here he's talking about... Here's a law that really has nothing to do with anything deeply moral dietary laws because it's what comes out of a man that defiles him, not what goes into him. So that's in a category by itself.

Generally speaking, though, even up to the end of his ministry, Jesus was telling the Jews to keep the law. In fact, you can find it in Matthew 20, I think it's Matthew 25. We'll just go there very quickly here.

Matthew 25, where Jesus is speaking to the multitudes. Now, this is after the Olivet Discourse, after the Sermon on the Mount, I'm sorry, after the sermon where he talks about his second coming. But in Matthew 25, he's abrading the Jewish leadership.

I think that's the right one. Maybe it's 26. No, maybe it's later.

Right there at the end, but I'll tell you what Jesus says. He tells the Jews, it's the larger passage where it says you should do tithe, mint, dill, and cumin, but you ignore the weightier provisions of the law. Anyway, this is where some people say, well, see, Jesus said you should tithe.

I don't think that's a New Testament teaching, but in any event, it's interesting because at the beginning of that sermon, he says, do everything that Moses tells you to do, but do not, I should say, do everything that the Pharisees tell you to do from Moses, from the law, basically, but don't do as they do. So he says the law, doing the things that you are supposed to do under the old covenant, you're still supposed to do that. But these guys who are your leaders aren't really doing it.

They aren't following that example. And instead they're, oh, here it is, Matthew 23, the woe is woe to you, woe to you, woe to you. And they do the deeds to be noticed by men.

Jesus spoke to the crowds, chapter 23 verse 2, the scribes and Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses, therefore all that they tell you, do and observe. Now let's hold covenant stuff. Do what Moses said.

Do what they tell you to do that Moses said. But do not do according to their deeds, for they say things and don't do that, et cetera. That's when all the woes follow.

So there's a certain sense that for the bulk of Jesus ministry, obviously, he's under the Old Testament system until his death and resurrection. And frankly, until the final launch of the new covenant, which kind of came sort of in phases a little bit, or it ramps up because Jesus at the last supper said, here's the blood of the new covenant. Here's the wine of the new covenant of my blood, et cetera.

But it's not until Pentecost, which is what 40, 50 days later, that the Holy Spirit comes down. And then you have the full inauguration of the new covenant with the giving of the Spirit, et cetera. And Acts chapter 2 chronicles that.

So with Jesus, you have him in a certain sense, standing a stride of two covenants with most of his weight in the first covenant. But anticipating the second, most of his weight of the old, anticipating the new. And so we have to qualify our understanding of what he teaches us to do based on that understanding.

And so it turns out that the old covenant, as such, is no longer incumbent upon anyone. It was never incumbent upon Gentiles, unless they were living in the Commonwealth. But it is no longer incumbent upon Jews now, since the new covenant was inaugurated on Pentecost Sunday.

So that doesn't mean, though, that none of the moral requirements that you find in the Mosaic covenant are incumbent upon new testament Christians, because there are universals in the old covenant that are also applied to anyone living anywhere at any time. Most of the 10 commandments I will say, except for the Sabbath, are like that. And there are other ones as well.

So sometimes this requires a little discernment then when you're reading Jesus commands. Is he speaking to a people under the Mosaic covenant and his directives apply to them in that sense? Or is he speaking to humans under the two great commandments that apply to all of us all the time, the commandment of love, so to speak? And so sometimes that takes some discernment to figure out those two, but that's in principle at least the way I divided up. So I think if we take a kind of a big picture look at all of this, we can see that God has always been doing one thing.

His goal has been to have a covenant people that he makes like Christ. Now he starts off, so all of the laws have to do with that. He starts off with the law in the Old Testament, but of course the law, and this is the point Paul makes, the law didn't give them the power to follow it.

So what we can see in all the commandments is we can see God's character. We can see who he is. We can see what he cares about.

We can see that he cares about justice. He cares about giving to people. He cares about widows and orphans.

He cares about who need help. All of these things we can find out from the Old Testament law, but the Old Testament law didn't give people the power to follow it. So what Paul says in Romans 7 is that when Jesus died, when we're joined to him, we die with him.

We're released from the law because we're dead. We're raised again. We're joined to Christ.

And now we have the Holy Spirit who continues to make us like Christ. So that is our goal as Christians now. And we can look at those commands in the Old Testament, in the Mosaic law, and we can see who God is and we can know who we are supposed to be.

We can look at Jesus. We can see who we are supposed to be. That is our goal.

So I think if we look at all of the laws in terms of that, that will help us to figure out what here is simply a way for God to separate the Jews from other people so that he could shape their character, because that was a big part. They weren't supposed to eat certain things. They weren't supposed to do certain things that didn't necessarily have anything to do with morality, but it had a way of separating them from the peoples around them so that their morality could develop the way God wanted it to develop in terms of the Mosaic law.

In the Church, that dividing wall is the Mosaic covenant. The law identifies it there. And it is meant to keep the Gentiles away from the Jews in a certain sense to protect them, as you were saying.

But now, of course, that whole dividing wall is broken down. And so the message can go freely to Gentiles who are now included in a organism in which there is neither Jew nor Greek before Christ. But again, we learn about who God is and who Jesus is from the Old Testament law.

So I don't want anyone to hear that we're saying, don't pay attention to that, because there are some who say that, but that's not correct. Our goal is to be like Christ, and we use everything God has revealed about himself and what he wants for us as we work on doing that, and the Holy Spirit helps us now. All right, Greg, here's a question from Stephanie.

Why do you think God chose to be illiterate when he came to earth? Would that make it too easy for us if he wrote? Well, she's trying to hold back a chuckle. It strikes me as an odd way of putting it. Is she suggesting that Jesus was illiterate because he never wrote anything down? Or is she suggesting that he was an infant so he couldn't write when he was a baby? No, I think Stephanie thinks he was illiterate because he never wrote anything.

Well, I have no reason to think he was illiterate, especially when we have an account of him in the synagogue reading from the scroll of Isaiah. I can read this right now. This is in Luke 4, 16, and then I'll skip a little bit to 20.

But he says, and he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him and he opened the book and found the place where it was written.

And then he reads from Isaiah and then it says, and he closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him and he began to say to them, today the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. So, no, Jesus wasn't illiterate, obviously.

So I'm trying to understand what to make of the question. If it's a serious question or whether it's just kind of a snarky remark. As if we'd be much better off if Jesus wrote something down instead of having his disciples write it down.

And he didn't, so I don't know if this is the intention or the subtext of the question, but that Stephanie is offering. It may not be at all, but maybe she's had this question put to her by

somebody else. But it says, if Jesus wrote something down, we could trust that, but we can't trust what others wrote that he said.

Of course, I don't know why that would be the case because that isn't the case even nowadays. If we have an accurate record of what somebody said, we have reason to believe it's an accurate record, then it doesn't matter who put pen to paper, so to speak, or ink to parchment. It doesn't matter.

It just matters if there's an accurate record of what he said. And so then the Gospels, the accounts of Jesus' life have to be assessed on their own merits in that way. It doesn't add anything to their legitimacy.

It wouldn't add anything to their legitimacy if Jesus were the one who wrote it all out, rather than somebody else writing what Jesus had said and did. To me, I'm sure God had his reasons for this, but there's something to reading from the perspective of others and seeing how he's impacting other people that comes across differently from one person alone writing about spiritual things. There's a whole different thing.

The New Testament is an historical account. It's not just, and now I'm going to tell you about some of Paul's works of our theology, but when it comes to Jesus and his years of ministry, it's an historical account. And so getting it from the perspective of others, to me, I'm trying to explain what I mean by this, but it just has a different feel from, say, Joseph Smith sitting in a room and writing out spiritual things, which to me feels much more suspect.

Yeah. Well, I think he's not up in the ivory tower. He is engaging with people.

And so the things that he's seeing and teaching are in the context of interpersonal relationships where he could scold or comfort as the circumstances require or heal or provide sustenance for, like feeding 5,000, et cetera, et cetera. So that's an entirely different kind of thing than kind of reading what he said. I'm just thinking, I pause for a moment because I was thinking, people could read my books, for example, and they get a lot of good information, but it's very different if they, and I've had people tell me this, and it's obvious.

So if I come to an event and I teach on tactics, then when I've, they've read what I've written on tactics because there's an element that can't be captured in writing that is present in a personal presentation. And it's not just the way of communicating. I can actually interact with people in a way that it displays my humanity, unlike a book does.

And so there's a whole different kind of thing going on. Now, it might be that somebody's watching and describing what's going on. But notice that the what's going on is not the same as the teaching in the book of tactics, as the example here.

It's me doing other things that are part of the whole presentation in a certain sense. I don't mean like public presentation, I mean me. So I'm there, I'm teaching and I'm interacting and I'm engaging and people are recording this.

This is very, very different and much more robust and more substantive than just writing down the specific things I said. And the writers of the Gospels are, as they write, they're acting as witnesses also. So you have other people basically saying, yes, this, we saw this, this is, you know, we're giving our, our name to this.

We agree with this. And then the other thing is, you know, Jesus came to accomplish something in particular. His main goal wasn't to give new revelation, like propositional revelation.

His main goal was to come and die on the cross and rise again. So that requires a different kind of, that doesn't, that, that's a different thing than, again, revealing things like Moses revealing the whole law. That was something different.

That was, you know, you could write that down, but Jesus actually came to do something. So a book wasn't necessarily the most important thing. This underscores the, the point in one of the first apologetics things that I learned, I was at the light and power house in the mid 70s.

I just recall this. Don't know where I heard it from. But that if you, you could take all the religious leaders out of their religious traditions that they represent or even found it, you'd still have the religion intact.

But if you take Jesus out of Christianity, you'd have no more Christianity because Christianity isn't about a series, a set of teachings. It's about what an individual did in his life, the life death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth 2000 years ago. All right, here's a question from Gino.

Just reading the sermon on the Mount again, when Jesus lays out the Lord's prayer and what he says around it reads to me like we should only pray that way and not ask for any other specific items. Is that accurate or am I missing something? I don't think that's accurate to put it simply. When we, when we look in the epistles, for example, or even in the book of Acts, we see prayers recorded in epistles, but in Acts, was it 19, or maybe 20, where Paul is saying goodbye to the Ephesian elders, they kneel down and pray.

And I think we have a record of Paul's prayer there. And it doesn't necessarily conform to what we find in the Sermon on the Mount, the so-called Lord's Prayer, probably more properly called the disciples prayer because the Lord's prayer is in John 17. When he prays to the Father for the disciples, the circumstance that we see there in the different areas of the synoptics where the Lord's prayer is given is when the disciples are not sure how to pray.

They are aware that Jesus prays. There are prayers that are part of the, in a certain sense, the cult of worship, things that they repeat and the Pharisees say and all this other stuff. Those are rote prayers, not dissing them.

They could repeat things, but they don't know how to be personal with God. Like the way they see Jesus is personal. They're aware of Jesus praying, and so they come to Jesus and say, Lord, teach us to pray.

Help us to know what to do. And then they pray these things and these things only. He says, pray this way.

And then he gives a kind of an outline of prayer. And the synoptics record different versions of it. You know, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Matthew, Mark, Luke are the synoptics on John.

And they have a lot of overlapping material. And so there are two, at least two places where the Lord's prayer is given and they're a little bit, just this goes different, but you get the sense of it. It's a pattern.

And you start with the father, you pray to the father. That's clearly Jesus' exhortation. And then you move down from there through these different things.

And there's a doxology in one version that's probably added by somebody else. That is the kingdom of the glory of the power forever. That's a, that's a, probably a scribal gloss because it's not the same in every manuscript, but in any event, you get the essence of it.

The irony to me is that Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, I think, tells the disciples not to pray in what he calls meaningless repetition, as if by seeing it more times you're going to get more favor. That's the way the pagans pray. And what people have done, some people have done with the so-called Lord's prayer, as they've done just that.

Let's just pray this prayer a whole bunch of times over and over and over and over and over and over again, because if we say it 10, 15, 20 times, we get more favor from God in doing it. So it's a very, it's a complete distortion. In any event, I don't think that what Jesus was doing was saying, here are the limits of prayer.

I think he's giving us a pattern, especially for people who are untutored in prayer, like the disciples, that you pray to the father, and here's a pattern. They entail a number of different things. There's some very good books that take the Lord's prayer.

Martin Luther did it. Who's the guy? Yeah, Tim Keller. Sorry.

Tim Keller did a good book. Kevin DeYoung did an excellent work on prayer, focusing on the Lord's prayer too. These are, they tend to be smaller works because it's a short prayer and they help you to understand how you can employ that in your own life.

But it's not meant to limit you, nor did the disciples take it as a limitation, as evidenced by their own prayers. Right. All we have to do is look at the other prayers and the New Testament.

Just look at all the prayers and you'll see they're not exactly word for word, those exact things. They're just categories of things that we should be praying for and keeping in mind. All right.

Thank you so much for your questions and we hope to hear from you. You can go to X, just use the hashtag STRS with your question, or you can go to our website at str.org. This is Amy Hall and Greg Kockel for Stand to Reason.

