

How Can I Determine What is Right and Wrong?

I. How to apply God's commands in the New Testament.

A. Almost all commands in the New Testament Letters (Romans-Jude) apply to believers today.

1. However, sometimes the cultural expression of the command will have to change in order to still fulfill the command's intent. Some examples are:

a. Footwashing, John 13:14-17 intent is humble service to others

¹⁴ "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. ¹⁶ "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. John 13:14-17 (NASB)

b. Head covering, 1 Cor. 11:4-14 intent is to show authority & submission

c. Holy kiss, 1 Cor. 16:20 intent is affectionate greeting

²⁰ All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. 1 Corinthians 16:20 (NASB)

2. Some commands are specific to the situation and do not apply. Romans 16:1-2

¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; ² that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well. Romans 16:1-2 (NASB)

B. Almost all commands in the Gospels (Matthew-John) apply to believers today. However, sometimes the command is specific to a situation and does not apply to all believers. Examples are:

1. Jesus' instructions to the twelve for their ministry to Jewish cities. Matt. 10:5-14

2. Jesus' instructions to the rich, young ruler to sell all of his possessions in order to follow Jesus. Matt. 19:21

²¹ Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go *and* sell your possessions and give to *the* poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." Matthew 19:21 (NASB)

C. The commands in Acts need to be evaluated as to whether they are specific for an individual or situation or given to those who represent all believers/all people.

a. Acts 3:19-20 legitimately applies to all people.

¹⁹ "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; ²⁰ and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, Acts 3:19-20 (NASB)

b. Acts 16:31 legitimately applies to all people.

³¹ They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." Acts 16:31 (NASB)

c. Acts 15:19-21 was unique instructions to new churches with Jews and Gentiles

¹⁹ "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, ²⁰ but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. ²¹ "For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath." Acts 15:19-21 (NASB)

II. How to apply God's commands in the Old Testament.

A. The OT commands were given to Israel, not to the church/mankind. Therefore we should assume they do not apply to us (Christians/mankind) unless they fall under one of the following criteria:

1. They are repeated in the New Testament.
2. They reflect God's will for mankind, not just Israel. Examples of these commands are:

a. Exercising wise stewardship over the Earth (Gen. 1:28)

²⁸ God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Genesis 1:28 (NASB)

b. The divine institution of marriage (Gen. 2:24)

²⁴ For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. Genesis 2:24 (NASB)

3. They are an inherent reflection of God's character.

a. The Ten Commandments are an example. Exodus 20:3-17

b. Laws forbidding false testimony (Exod. 20:1-2) and taking bribes (Exod. 23:8) reflect God's truth and justice.

c. Laws forbidding child sacrifice (Lev. 20:2-5) and consulting mediums and spiritists (Lev. 20:6,27) violate God's role as giver of Life and only dispenser of revelation.

B. Some major portions of the OT Law have been fulfilled by Jesus and the new covenant.

1. All dietary laws were rendered obsolete (Acts 10:9-16)
2. All sacrificial laws were fulfilled in Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross (Heb. 10:1-18)
3. All OT Laws regarding Sabbaths, festival days are fulfilled in Christ (Col. 2:16-17)

¹⁶Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— ¹⁷things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Colossians 2:16-17 (NASB)

C. Even when OT Laws do not directly apply to us, we can still learn from their underlying principles (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

1. The principle behind the Jubilee Laws
2. The OT penal code.
3. The requirement to not harvest the edge of the fields.
4. Paul provides an example of applying the principle behind the law in 1 Cor. 9:7-11

⁷Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? ⁸I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? ⁹For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? ¹⁰Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. ¹¹If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 1 Corinthians 9:7-11 (NASB)