

The Law P2

The Prophets

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Speakers in the audio file:

Jon Collins

Tim Mackie

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Jon: Welcome back to The Bible Project podcast. I'm Jon Collins. We're going to be talking again with Tim Mackie and continuing the conversation on the law. We're going to pick up where we left off, talk about the prophets and how they continue Moses' metaphor of eating a circumcised heart and how they expand on that metaphor.

Then we're going to get to Jesus and how he talks about fulfilling the law, how he summarizes all the law and the great command. Then we're going to talk about his followers and how they wrestle through how to also fulfill the law and how Paul the Apostle does that in his own life and how he encourages other people to do it as well.

Our video on the law is at youtube.com/thebibleproject. We got other videos there too. But hey, let's jump in.

So Israel has failed to fulfill law. And then we get to the prophets, and then the prophets are all looking back and then trying to explain to people of their day why this is happening, and they came to the same conclusions that Moses came to.

Tim: The most important figures who address this are the two prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who were contemporaries. They lived through the exile of Israel, and the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. They both said that all this horrible stuff is happening because of Israel's rebellion and disobedience.

They said, "if there's going to be any hope for a future, - which they believe there was for Israel, and for God's purposes in the world - then God's people, the human heart would need to undergo some fundamental transformation, some healing." They developed Moses' metaphor that your hearts need to be circumcised, which is an odd metaphor.

Jon: I was going to dig into that. Does he say both things - your heart is hard and then he also says your heart need to be circumcised?

Tim: Yeah. For Moses, the diagnoses is the metaphor of having a hard heart, which in the Torah is used to describe Pharaoh. So Israel has become Pharaoh.

Jon: It's not a compliment.

Tim: Not a compliment. Yeah, totally. So the solution that Moses sees is, after you guys go into exile, God will be faithful, and one day He will change the hearts of His people, which is in this metaphor and Deuteronomy 30 that Moses says, "God will circumcise your hearts, so that you can love Him and follow Him."

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Jon: And that's such a strange image.

Tim: It's a metaphor of a metaphor.

Jon: It's a metaphor of a metaphor.

Tim: Well, think, if you have hard heart, that's a metaphor.

Jon: By the way, let's talk about in Hebrew, the word "heart," that's more of center of your not...

Tim: Not just of emotion, but also your will and choice. There's no word for brain in Hebrew. You don't think, decide and feel all in your heart.

Jon: So a hard heart is really a hard spirit, a hard sense of self.

Tim: Yeah, stubbornness, pride, a sense of I know what's best, don't tell me what to do.

Jon: And then let's talk about circumcision. Circumcision was just merely a sign to show that you're in with God's community.

Tim: That's right. Yeah. And it has its origins in God's promise to Abraham to take one guy who can't have kids and then he turns them into a nation like the sand in the desert, something, or stars in the sky. So Israel was to mark the male organ with a symbolic sign, removing skin as a symbol that their fruitfulness to reproduce was a gift from God.

So Moses is merging these metaphors of taking away skin and then the heart as being the center of will and feeling and choice. Moses thinks there's something wrong with your heart and you need to have some serious removal of the flesh from your heart.

Jon: Not literally.

Tim: Metaphorically.

Jon: Metaphorically.

Tim: That's right. That's the metaphor. There's something so fundamentally wrong with your moral sensibilities and your pride, that part of your humanity is so corrupted, it needs to be removed, and we need to be replaced with something new.

Jon: Why did Moses choose this metaphor of circumcision? Is there a connection between the faith that you have to have God in Him being enough for your

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reproduction and taking care of your family, which is what circumcision was a symbol of, also just of you being in the family? Or is he doing something else? Am I reading too much into his use of that word?

Tim: My own reflections on it have been that they're both related to hope for the future. But I could be wrong about this. My conclusion has always been that Moses is innovating and adding a new layer of meaning to the symbol because there's nothing about the foreskin that's wrong. But now he's had an encounter where he says, "There is something wrong with the hearts."

Jon: "There is something wrong that needs to be cut away."

Tim: So for the future of the covenant people, a whole piece of our will and stubbornness and pride needs to get cut away. I could be wrong about that. In the reading that I've done, I've never seen anybody make a good case for more than that. But I could be wrong.

Jon: So then we were in the prophets and the prophets then also iterate on this image.

Tim: They pick up the idea and use their own metaphors. Jeremiah says that one day God will renew the covenant, and He will write the laws of the Torah on the heart of His people, so that Israelites won't even need priests or teachers anymore and say, "Hey, you should follow the laws." And Jeremiah says, "They will all know me, and I'll remember their sins no more."

So there's coming, a great act of forgiveness for which all of Israel's rebellion will be finally dealt with, and every Israelite will have this internal compass where love for God and obedience to God will become second nature. That's Jeremiah's hope.

Then Ezekiel actually picks up the hard heart and says, Yeah, "God's going to remove your hard heart and give you a new heart of flesh." Then he says that will happen because of God's own life presence. The Spirit is going to come into you and animate you. So just like the Spirit, just like God's breath and personal animating life presence—

Jon: Calling back to Genesis.

Tim: Calling back to Genesis. Yeah, that humans are dirt and divine breath—

Jon: Gets put in to us.

Tim: And so now the new humans that love and obey God also need a new act of God's creative power to animate us with His divine breath. And that will bring about a

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fundamental change in the moral compass of the human mind and heart. That's what Ezekiel says.

Jon: So there's three metaphors now?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: There's circumcising the heart, there's heart transplant, essentially, and then there's writing the law on your heart, which is calling towards the writing of a commandment on stone, or on papers.

Tim: The writing of the 10 commandments even. It's scribing them on stone. They won't be inscribed on stone but inscribed on the heart.

Jon: Those are three really great metaphors to dwell on as we try to wrestle through what does it mean for our affection and will and desire to change fundamentally. What does that look like?

Tim: Yeah, that's right. There's something about the human condition that needs to be fundamentally transformed. If you stop and think about it...I don't know, we're both beginning to approach middle age in life, so—

Jon: When does that start?

Tim: I don't know. In your 30s.

Jon: No. It's like third age now.

Tim: So if you're 40s is middle-aged, then where...?

Jon: Is 40s middle age?

Tim: I feel like.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: If you're going to live about 80 years—

Jon: I guess we're approaching middle age.

Tim: We're approaching it. We're both in our...

Jon: Late 30s.

Tim: Anyway.

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Jon: Thanks for that reminder.

Tim: My point in bringing that up was, the older you get, the more you have of your own personal history of just moral track record.

Jon: I just try not to think about it.

Tim: You have your own failures to look back on your own mistakes, the things you wish you would have done differently, or you start to notice the things that you feel like you ought to be doing that you don't find yourself doing. All the dreams you had about the kind of person you want to be in your 20s, you end up not being that person.

We all have this sense of a lack of like moral will and moral willpower. Sometimes we're able to do it, sometimes we're not. And I think that's what the story and these images are putting their thumb on. You don't have to be religious to know that we're not—

Jon: There's a deficit.

Tim: There's a deficit of some kind when it comes to love and justice and goodness. The Bible also recognizes that, is diagnosing it and saying, "Yeah, that's the core of the problem." And also that God wants to do something about that to change us.

The summary of the pieces so far, the Torah is a story designed to show that Israel did not and could not keep God's law. Moses says that's because the human condition is so broken and corrupted that we need to be transformed from the inside out by God's own life. He says circumcision of the heart.

And so Jeremiah and Ezekiel, pick that up, develop it and say, "Yeah, we need God's Spirit, we need God's law written deep inside of us." And so, it all points forward. But the Old Testament story itself never shows the realization of any of those hopes or promises. It's unresolved tension as you close the Old Testament.

[00:12:33]

Jon: Let's talk about Jesus of Nazareth.

Tim: Jesus comes on to the scene in a really important passage in Matthew chapter 5. He says he didn't come here to announce the Kingdom of God and say, "Oh, yeah, we're done with the laws in the Torah, we don't need the law." He said, "I didn't come to set the law side or abolish it." But he didn't come to leave it alone either. He said he came to fulfill it.

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Then he gives a series of teachings where he quotes from some of the 10 commandments. Actually, he says, "If you're going to be my follower and live in God's kingdom, true obedience to this command will mean so much more than just the written command." So he talks about how don't murder is truly fulfilled with not even hating or resenting or speaking or thinking badly about any person ever.

The moral ideal that God was getting after with "don't murder" is don't nurse any ill thoughts or feelings towards another human. He says, "That's the kind of humans that I'm here to make in my community of followers in the kingdom." He says that what he's doing is to fulfill the law, which means to fulfill the laws like "don't murder" to actually fulfill God's ideal in giving that law.

Jon: To fulfill it himself, to do it himself.

Tim: Yeah, to do it himself and also create a community of people who would themselves follow him, and so fulfill the law. There are two things I think he's fulfilling. He's fulfilling the storyline that has all these unresolved plot tensions of Israel not being able to fulfill the law. So here he is, an Israelite, and Israel's Messiah, here to be that Israelite who will live in a way that obeys and loves God and fulfills the law. But then also in his teachings, he's calling others to come and follow Him so that they too can fulfill the law.

Jesus is so interesting because he's saying, "I'm not here to set aside the law," but yet he does see himself in some way as an authority over the law to say what it really means and what it really was for, and that he's here to do it.

Jon: Which is a very—

Tim: The gutsy move in Jewish culture.

Jon: Isn't there a story in the New Testament where Jesus is accused of breaking the Sabbath?

Tim: Yeah, his followers are.

Jon: His followers are accused of breaking the Sabbath?

Tim: Yeah. They're picking some grain and working it out to eat the seeds and kernels on the Sabbath. Or where he heals somebody on the Sabbath. So Jesus enters into dispute with religious scholars about the Sabbath.

Jon: Because at this point, the Sabbath laws in the Old Testament are not so clear as to what you can pick and not pick?

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Tim: Yeah, just says, "Don't work."

Jon: "Don't work." And then you get this whole tradition around what does that mean and not mean and not mean.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: I guess what I'm cueing off of is you saying that Jesus sees himself above the law. He doesn't say in a passage like...He basically is like, "Look, I know what the Sabbath is for, and I'm not breaking the Sabbath."

Tim: Yeah. Even with a command like "rest on the Sabbath," he felt confident to challenge current interpretations of what meant work and rest and kind of cross those to put forward what he thought it meant to rest on the Sabbath. And rest did not exclude healing, or doing good or even working enough to provide for yourself if you're hungry and about to fall over.

The point isn't that Jesus broke the Sabbath. The point is, is that he saw himself as an authority. One of my favorite scholars on Matthew, RT, France, he put it this way in a way that stuck with me. He said, "Most rabbis had debates about the Torah and positioned how they're teaching was most faithful to the Torah. But the Torah is the fixed point of reference. And when you hear Jesus's teachings, it's reversed, where he makes himself the center and talks about the Torah's relationship to him and his teaching. And that the Torah is fulfilled by what I'm teaching and doing." And that was different.

Jon: That kind of move is going to irritate a lot of people.

Tim: Yeah, totally. Clearly, he earned a lot of enemies by his teaching and as it spread. But in the same book, Matthew, he also agrees with Moses and the prophets by saying, "Yeah, the problem is the human heart." He agrees with the diagnosis that the problem is the human heart. He has that teaching - it's out of the heart that comes all this stuff.

Jon: Well, and he has a lot of respect for the laws too in that the story of the rich young ruler comes and he's like, "What do I need to do?" And he's like, "What are the commands?"

Tim: Yeah, "How you doing on the 10 commandments?"

Jon: "Let's start there."

Tim: Yeah, that's right. So the laws were clear reference point. They were regarded as a divine Word. One of the unique hallmarks and trademarks of Jesus' message was the

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way that he boiled all of the laws of the Old Testament down to what he called the Great command. He was actually asked what's the most important command of the 613 in the Torah, and he answers a question by giving two commands. But he calls it the singular.

Jon: Because Jesus can't count.

Tim: Or he's way too brilliant for all of that. The first one is from Jewish prayer based in Deuteronomy 6 called the Shema: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Then he says, "The second part of the great command is "love your neighbor as yourself."

So Jesus agrees with Moses and the prophets that the fundamental problem is the human heart. That we don't love God and love others enough to always do what is right by others. And so, Jesus says, "Here's the true north for the kinds of humans that God has always envisioned us to become is a human who always loves God by always loving others, and by always loving others is always loving God. So he boiled it down and he made that the center point for all of his teachings.

But you can see somehow in Jesus's mind creating humans who love God and love others that will deal with all the plot tensions of the Old Testament story and fulfill it. It's these kinds of humans that God has always called us to be but that we have failed to be, and Jesus is here to be that person and make others into people who can do that too.

Jon: So when Jesus thinks about loving God and loving others as being the greatest command, does he mean that's all you need to really worry about - just focus on those two things, and then everything else will work out? Or is he just saying, "If I had to prioritize them, this one's the greatest? That's the one."

Tim: I mean, I think it's within the context of which of the commands is the most important. So if that's your true north, then in any scenario, you will do the right thing. If you truly are elevating God's honor and goodness and the well being of others ahead of yourself, you will do the right thing. You will be the kind of human that God made and called you to be. I think that's what he means.

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Jon: So Jesus didn't come to abolish the laws. In fact, he had a lot of respect for the laws.

Tim: But also Jesus saw them as within a storyline that pointed forward to something greater than the law that was needed. And he seemed to believe that he was greater thing that was needed. He was going to do something that solves the problem that

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Moses and the prophets identified. That's about something to do with Israel and humanities broken relationship to God because of all that rebellion and sin, and also fixing the human heart.

It seems Jesus saw himself as addressing all of that through his death, crucifixion at Passover, dying as the Passover lamb, bearing the sins of Israel into himself, bearing the consequences of Israel's rebellion on Israel's behalf, and exhausting the power of human rebellion and the curse that results and so on.

Jon: And then gives the Spirit to his followers so that they can have a new heart.

Tim: The basic idea of God's Spirit in the New Testament it's picking up off of the divine life breath. From Genesis 2, God animates the dirt with his own life. Ezekiel hope that God's own life breath would have to recreate humans again to truly love and follow Him. And so, Jesus picks that up in his teachings about the Spirit and said that out of what he did at the cross and the resurrection, that God's Spirit would come and create a new humanity out of His people.

The Gospel of Luke particularly paves the way. It talks about the Spirit more than any of the other Gospels. And then into Acts, Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit, and then it's Paul and Peter's letters specifically that began to fill out a theology of the role of the Spirit as transforming the heart of Jesus' followers.

Jon: Now, the early Christians were all Jews.

Tim: They were.

Jon: So, as they are now receiving the Spirit and wrestling through that new reality, they're still following Jewish customs because they're Jews.

Tim: Yeah, still going to temple, still fully a part of the worship in Jerusalem Sabbath, all that stuff.

Jon: Still eating kosher.

Tim: Eating kosher, yeah.

Jon: We've been talking about all of this in context of Jewish people who practice the Jewish faith—

Tim: Or even about Israel who's called to this covenant relationship that takes the forms of its religious traditions in laws of the Torah.

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Jon: Then Jesus tells his disciples to go out beyond Israel and to make disciples. One of the implications immediately becomes, well, do these other non-Jewish followers of Jesus, do they need to follow all of these Jewish traditions, especially ones that were designed to keep the Jewish people separate from the Gentiles? Because one of the purposes of the law was to keep the nation separate.

Tim: The Canaanite and so no.

Jon: So we got the kosher law, we got circumcision, we got Sabbath as the big three. What do the non-Jewish followers do with those laws?

Tim: This was the central debate in the first decade of the Christian movement. That debate and the tensions created are felt in almost every book of the New Testament. It's the central debate going on in the early church.

The book of Acts frames it in terms of the Jesus movement is spreading. You have non-Jewish people who love Jesus, who hear about him, want to follow him, and are finding themselves empowered and being changed by his own presence by the Spirit. And so, the Jewish followers of Jesus say, "Well, that's legit. Jesus is really after these people. He's changing them."

Then they have this debate and the key kind of biblical chapter where it comes together is in Acts 15. The apostles discerned by actually looking back at the prophets, and the writings of the prophets, that God always intended the family of Abraham and the God's kingdom to encompass all nations.

And so, they decide that the laws in the Torah that were for the purpose of setting Israel apart as a culture had played their role in the story. And that they were relevant for Israel for that part of the story, but now that Jesus has come and fulfilled them, and lived by them and brought the story to its fulfillment that non-Jewish followers of Jesus are not required to live by those laws. It was a heated debate.

Tim: Because not everyone agreed with it.

Tim: Not everyone agreed with the apostles who were the appointed kind of deputized leaders of the movement that Jesus appointed. So not everyone agreed. There were Pharisees who had become Christian, followers of Jesus, and some of them disagreed and some of them agreed though.

Paul the Apostle then becomes the person and the author in the New Testament who was most passionate on behalf of these non-Jewish followers of Jesus. That's why we find in his letters—

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Jon: The apostle to the Gentiles?

Tim: The apostle to the Gentiles. And we find in his letters the most thorough exploration of this whole debate and why he thought it was vitally important that non-Jewish followers of Jesus were not obligated to follow those laws from the Torah.

Jon: And how did that work out in his own life? Did Paul stop following the laws? Did he only do it in certain circumstances?

Tim: It seems like his default was to go to his own heritage. There are some places in Acts where he does some things with vows when he's in Jerusalem, and so on, where he follows the traditions in the Torah.

But he says why though. In his letter first letter to the Corinthians, he says, "Listen, if I'm among Jews, I always want any Jewish people I'm around to know about Jesus and follow Him. So I'm going to live kosher and do that." But then he said, "If I'm among Gentiles and non-Jewish people, I'm not going to live in a way that's going to create unnecessary obstacles to them knowing about Jesus and following him." So he says, "I become like someone who's not following the law."

Jon: So his litmus test is, "Am I living in such a way that I'm hindering or helping someone see the good news of Jesus?"

Tim: Correct, yeah. And in his letters to the house churches in Rome and his letters to the churches in the region of Galatia, there were non-Jewish and Jewish followers of Jesus in those church communities. And so, he gives guidance about how to sort out these conflicts about the Sabbath with the food laws.

Basically, he says, "Don't judge each other for one person honoring the Sabbath and eating kosher is there a way of loving and following and honoring Jesus. And for somebody else, whatever, leaving town or doing an extra day at work on the Sabbath so that they can...this is not his example, but worshiping God on another day, that's how they love and follow Jesus. Don't judge each other. You'll each be held accountable to your own heart devotion to Jesus.

Actually, where he nailed them is he said, "You guys as church community, you're not loving each other. You're actually becoming legalistic and bitter, and backbiting each other." He says, "Ironically you're trying to fulfill the law and you're actually breaking the great command of Jesus by being such jerks to each other." In Paul, he just quotes Jesus. He just says, "The person who loves God and loves their neighbor is the one who fulfills the law. And if you're doing that you can be sure you're on good ground."

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Jon: At one point he does get really upset at people who are trying to Judaize is the term —

Tim: Yeah, it's basically circumcision.

Jon: And that's because that just was adding confusion to the gospel or what was his...?

Tim: In Galatians, specifically the circumcisions, there were some Jewish Christians who would come into this church community and there were non-Jewish Christians there who were never circumcised. And he's "What? You're trying to follow the Jewish Messiah but you're not circumcised?"

So for Paul, that was compromising because, one, it's saying, "To be a part of Jesus's people, to be a part of Abraham's family, I have to perform these rituals." And for Paul, that diminished the good news of God's grace that apart from anything I do or don't do, God just has reached out to me in the person of Jesus. And the moment that I make my observance of a religious ritual, like the requirement for God accepting me, Paul thinks you've lost the heartbeat of the whole thing. So he gets really ticked.

Jon: He gets heated.

Tim: He says, "I wish they would emasculate themselves."

Jon: Snip the whole thing.

Tim: "I wish they would snip." But for him, it's not just because he was a jerk.

Jon: That's so funny that that's in the Bible.

Tim: It is in the Bible. He says, "I wish they would mutilate themselves."

Jon: It's just like Paul's venting a little bit.

Tim: He's venting. He's ticked in the letter to the Galatians. Again, he gets a bad rap for being that emotionally intense. But I think he was just so truly enraptured with the love of Jesus and he so wanted people to know the love and the grace of Jesus that when any religious person got in the way of that, he just—

Jon: It's kind of like that psychological thing where when someone who's a lot like you does the thing that you hate, because I mean, he grew up in that tradition.

Tim: That's true. Yeah, totally.

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Jon: It's probably the thing he wrestled with the most. I don't know, I'm reading into this now.

Tim: Or flip it. I mean, what I'm saying is I think it's because he was so transformed and enthralled by the love of Jesus that anything that hindered another person from experiencing that, he just got...Especially when they were doing it in the name of Jesus.

[00:34:12]

Jon: I'm really interested in your take on when people say, "Well, the Sabbath is now Sunday" what that whole tradition is. I have a lot of friends and I run into people all the time are like falling in love with the Sabbath, and they follow the Sabbath because they just see the wisdom in it.

Then there are some people who go, "Well, and then also we're supposed to because God gave us the Sabbath and He commanded it." I think it gets kind of confusing, because then one of the retorts is, "well yeah, we followed on Sunday and that's what church is about." Then there's this debate about was the Sabbath switch to Sunday? Is the whole worshiping on Sunday thing even about the Sabbath? What's that all about?

Tim: It's kind of confusing how things get layered in. The thing we just talked about, the debate about non-Jewish followers following the laws that set Israel apart, Sabbath was one of the practices that set Jewish people apart in the Roman world, especially. We live in a world that's been so Jewish/Christianized that we are—

Jon: We got weekends. We got two days.

Tim: Two days.

Jon: Two days of rest.

Tim: In the Roman world that was crazy because you work and the only way you get out of work is by becoming wealthy.

Jon: Or getting sick. By becoming wealthy, okay.

Tim: So Jews were seen as lazy or anti-social, that kind of thing. It was one of the things that set Jewish people apart. The earliest Christians after the resurrection and in those early decades seem to have had to shift where many of them stopped honoring the Sabbath, especially non-Jewish, it's not their tradition.

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Paul even mentions that as one of the debatable matters in Romans 14 and also in the letter to the Colossians. So that's where it fits for Paul, it's one of these debatable matters that non-Jewish followers don't have to do anymore.

But as best as we can tell, the Christian day of gathering to worship and sing and take the bread and the cup and so on started taking place on Sunday very early based on the fact that the resurrection of Jesus took place on Sunday, which on their calendar was the first day of the week.

We have a reference to the Lord's Day. In the book of Revelation, John's says, "I was on the island of Patmos on the Lord's day," which is presumably Sunday. And then it's lost. I mean, just off the top my head there's a couple early church historians and fathers who start mentioning on the day that Christians gather, it's Sunday - connected to the Resurrection Day.

Jon: So it wasn't a Sabbath...?

Tim: It's not about Sabbath being shifted to Sunday, it Sabbath became a debatable matter. And as Christianity became majority non-Jewish, it just wasn't. But Christians have their own practice of setting aside time to gather worship Jesus, take the bread the cup on Resurrection Day. And that practice became the mainstream. That's a nutshell answer. There's more to it than that, but that's the nutshell.

Jon: And it's not like they had a weekend and they're like, "Well, we're off Saturday and Sunday, which day should we go to church?"

Tim: Totally. Again, there'll be people that differ with me on this. I think it seems to me fairly clear that Sabbath is one of those debatable matters. You can do it if in your heart that helps you honor and worship Jesus. I think for Paul it fits into that category. But also it's one of the laws, so there's a principle of God's wisdom in giving the 24 hours Sabbath, which was evening the evening.

Jon: What embedded in the creation story, it seems like a really big deal.

Tim: Yeah, yeah, totally. I think it's stupid not to, but once again, am I a part of the family of Jesus and accepted by God because I observe the Sabbath? And there I think we would be crossing a line.

Jon: That's a good segue into I think kind of the final thing we should talk about, which is you mentioned there's wisdom in the law. Let's say I'm a new Christian, I'm a non-Jewish Christian, and so I realize that the main point then is to love God and love others and I can only do that through the power of the Spirit. That's where I would begin, right?

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Tim: Yeah.

Jon: But then I've got this whole tradition of God's Word and in it are a bunch of laws pertaining to how I should live.

Tim: How ancient Israel was to live.

Jon: How ancient Israel was to live. And then we also see in the New Testament letters references to these laws a lot. They seem to be still important. But if I go and try to obey all the laws and I'm doing the year of living biblically and I'm throwing pebbles at poor ladies on the street, tease us out?

Tim: I think in a nutshell Jesus and the apostles do quote from the laws. You'll see specifically the quote from laws that already are themselves stated as principles that transcend ethnic groups like most of the 10 commands. Not Sabbath, but don't murder or honor your parents. So Paul the Apostle feels free to pull out "honor your parents" to instruct non-Jewish Christians living in Ephesus.

Jon: And it's not because his presupposition is "of course, you're going to follow the laws and this is one of them." It's "this is a moral command that we could all agree there's a principle behind it."

Tim: Yeah. "Here's something that God said to Israel and this law will serve to guide you and loving God and loving others the way Jesus taught us. So kids, honor your parents."

Jon: So it seems like what you're saying is then Paul got a filter. He goes through the laws and he says, "Cool. If this is what God said to ancient Israel, and I know I need to love God and love others, the filter becomes, "how do I apply this law to myself and my culture in such a way that I'm actually loving God and loving others"?

If some of these laws like "Honor your father" go through the filter without being touched, they just get right through. But then another law like "don't muzzle the ox," he'll quote it and he'll put it through the filter, and then he'll find a principal underneath of it.

Tim: That's right. It's a great way of putting it. So for Paul, his filter is, "love God, love your neighbor," the great command of Jesus. In one of his letters, Romans 13, he starts quoting the 10 commandments: Don't commit adultery, don't murder, don't steal, don't covet. And he says, "And if there's any other command, it's all summed up in this. Love your neighbor as yourself." So he quotes Leviticus. He's quoting the Leviticus commands that Jesus said summarizes a great command.

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Then he says, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore, Love is the fulfillment of the law." So for Paul, that's his filter, the great command of Jesus. But he will also appeal to laws that seem very detailed or obscure and discern a principle that will come into the service of the great command.

So for example, he quotes that law in Deuteronomy 25 about not muzzling an ox while it's working treading in Greenfield.

Jon: And a muzzle would be the thing that keeps them from eating?

Tim: Yeah. You would put a muzzle the ox to not eat the grain that he's supposed to be grinding out. If you've got 100 pounds of grain and the ox eat 10 while he's working, you just lost 10 pounds of grain or whatever. I don't know if an ox eats 10 pounds of grain.

Jon: I have no idea.

Tim: This is in 1 Corinthians 9; Paul still thinks that law is valuable as a source of divine wisdom. He discerned the principle underneath it that God cares for those who work hard, share in the results of their labor. And then he goes on to apply that to humans specifically to leaders in the church. That they should be compensated for working, giving hours and energy to lead in a church.

Pay your pastors. Why? Well, don't muzzle the ox. For Paul, it just follows that you go to a law in Deuteronomy and see and care what it says.

Jon: And do you think Paul is then saying, "So this is now a new law payer pastors and now we need to put that in our law book and make sure we're checking that one off?" Or is he just saying, "Here is a principal and here's the way the principal can be applied?" But he didn't take a paycheck.

Tim: That's more in the particulars of what he's saying. To back to your first point—

Jon: I don't bring that up to try to be divisive or anything. I just I'm saying like, is he creating law or is he just creating principle?

Tim: No. I think Paul sees the law as a source of wisdom to help teach God's people new applications of how to love your neighbor.

Jon: I think I grew up in a tradition where I was trained to read the New Testament has more law.

Tim: I see. Got it.

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Jon: So like, there's all these things where's it's like, "Okay, so we're not supposed to do that. Paul mentions don't do that, Paul mentions to do this." And now you're just kind of collecting these things.

Tim: That's a good example. I think all have the moral commands that Paul gives in his letters we know come from some worldview deep underneath that for Paul this is a way of loving God and loving my neighbor. And Paul is giving specific applications of that in all these different moral exhortations.

And we know that that's his filter because he says, "Listen, all the commands that you could ever give are summed up in this: "love your neighbor as yourself."

Jon: So do we need to do the same exercise or can we just rely on what Paul did and say probably he did enough?

Tim: Man, you know, for me, personally, I need to get underneath it. For following Jesus to make sense to me, I want to understand the moral worldview underneath the commands in the New Testament, especially when they come into conflict with moral sensibilities of the culture I grew up in. Because sometimes there's conflict, usually in the realm of sexual ethics.

For me, I really want to know the moral principles underneath that make sense of what I'm being called to do as a follower of Jesus. I think it's a vital step of Christian growth in following Jesus to learn how to think on the level of first principles. And I think those are the kinds of people that Jesus wanted to form are people who have wisdom to know exactly how to love God and love neighbor and all the different possible situations and cultures.

Jon: This kind of brings us back to that whole boiling a goat in the mother's milk. Is that the interpretation was, "Well, the principal underneath is it's just cruel to bake an animal and the life source of that animal." There's just something twisted about that. And then you get all these kosher laws that come out of that.

But back when we talked about that, you said there's good evidence now that that wasn't actually why that law was made. Is there a danger in doing the exercise or trying to find the wisdom underneath the law?

Tim: Oh, sure. Sure there is. You could be wrong.

Jon: I could be wrong. Isn't it safer just to obey the law how it was written?

Tim: Sure, but I don't own an ox. I don't ever tread grain. I mean, well, that's getting to earlier question of what's the value of those laws.

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Jon: Sure.

Tim: But there may be way there may be creative ways of loving God and loving my neighbor that I wouldn't think of if I didn't do that exercise. This is back to Sailhamer's idea about one of the roles in the law was to give us a view of what the laws affected in Israel's life. So love of God and neighbor affected diet, affected the way I run my business, the way I treat employees the way I designed my house to be a place that's safe, that prevent injury.

All of these laws all of sudden get you thinking about like, "Well, God cares about all these aspects of human community in life that I might overlook in a hyper-individualistic Western culture." And so, there's immense wisdom to be gained from getting the principles under the laws. Can we get them wrong sometimes? I suppose so. But if your true north is love God and love neighbor, you can't go that wrong.

Jon: That's it on the law. We'd love to hear your questions about this topic. We're on Twitter, @JoinBibleProj and on Facebook, facebook.com/thebibleproject. You can see all of our videos on YouTube - they're free - youtube.com/thebibleproject. And our website is jointhebibleproject.com. All right, see you next time.