“You have heard that it was said”

Scripture, we find two kinds of laws related to human conduct: those directly commanded by God, and those instituted by human leaders or customs that God permitted temporarily among His people. For example, the Israelites were allowed to practice divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1), capital punishment for certain sins such as adultery (Deuteronomy 22:22), and the principle of lex talionis—“an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” (Exodus 21:24)—which regulated justice and prevented excessive punishment.

However, it is crucial to understand that these laws, while found in the Torah, were not part of God’s original design for human relationships and society. From the beginning, God’s intention was for marriage to be a permanent, sacred union. As recorded in Genesis 2:24 (ESV):

> *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”*

God never commanded divorce or killing as ideal practices. These laws arose from the hardness of human hearts and the sinful condition of mankind. We see this clearly in the teaching of Jesus Christ, who restored God’s original intention for marriage and human relationships.

The Context of Moses’ Law

The children of Israel inherited many customs from Egypt and their surrounding cultures, including divorce, revenge, and harsh punishments. When God led them out of Egypt to the Promised Land, their hearts remained stubborn and attached to these practices. Because of their spiritual immaturity and hardness of heart, God allowed Moses to permit these laws temporarily. This was an act of divine concession (also called *economy* or *economia* in theological terms), not a reflection of God’s perfect will.

Jesus explains this concession in Matthew 19:3-9 (ESV):

> *3* And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?”
> *4* He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,
> *5* and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’?
> *6* So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”
> *7* They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?”
> *8* He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.
> *9* And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

Here, Jesus emphasizes the original intent of marriage as lifelong and exclusive. The allowance of divorce by Moses was a concession to human sinfulness, not God’s ideal. This shows us how God’s law interacts with human weakness — God accommodates but does not approve the brokenness of sin.

Theological Significance

This teaching reveals the progressive nature of divine revelation. The Old Testament laws contained both moral principles and ceremonial or civil regulations appropriate for Israel’s covenantal context. Many laws in the Old Testament anticipate or find their true fulfillment in Christ (Hebrews 8:13). The Mosaic law is *pedagogical* (Galatians 3:24), guiding God’s people until the coming of the Messiah who perfects and fulfills the Law.

This is why Paul writes in Romans 1:28 (ESV):

> *“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.”*

God allows human beings to follow their hardened desires, but this is not His perfect plan.

God’s Heart Toward Enemies and Justice

It is also important to recognize that the Old Testament laws regarding revenge and punishment were limited and regulated to prevent escalating cycles of violence (Exodus 21:23-25). They were justice-oriented, not personal vengeance. Yet, God’s

ultimate revelation in Christ calls for a higher standard.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commands radical love and forgiveness (Matthew 5:43-45, ESV):

> *43* “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’
> *44* But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,
> *45* so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.”

This calls us beyond the legalistic, retributive mindset to a life marked by grace, mercy, and reconciliation—reflecting God’s own character.

Paul reinforces this in Romans 12:20-21 (ESV):

> *20* “To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”
> *21* “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with

> good.”

This is the ethic of the Kingdom—not retaliation but overcoming evil through love and goodness.

Conclusion

The laws in the Old Testament reflect God’s patience and mercy toward a fallen people. They are not the final word but part of God’s unfolding redemptive plan. Jesus came to restore God’s original intent for marriage, justice, and human relationships. He calls us to a higher standard of holiness, love, and forgiveness.

Our role today is to live according to this new covenant, pray for those who oppose us, and share the good news of God’s transforming grace.

Maranatha!

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