

Belgic Confession 25 – Ceremonial Pictures

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Some people have no interest in the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. They simply view them as “*Old Testament*” and therefore not relevant or maybe less relevant. But ceremonial laws teach very important things of who Jesus is and what he did for you. So you must properly understand the ceremonial laws, and you will understand them today.

Our headings are:

The **Completion of the Ceremonial Laws** (礼仪律)

The **Continuation of the Principles of the Ceremonial laws**

Our goals are: **That, through pictures, you will see that your salvation was fully accomplished by Jesus Christ, and that the more you know him, the more you will love and worship him.**

We believe that the **ceremonies and symbols** of the law **ceased at the coming of Christ**, and that all the **shadows are accomplished**; so that the use of them must be abolished among Christians; yet the **truth and substance of them remain with us in Jesus Christ**, in whom they have their completion. In the meantime we **still use the testimonies taken out of the law** and the prophets to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel, and to **regulate our life in all honorableness** to the glory of God, according to His will.

我们相信礼仪律在基督降世时已经废止¹，一切的预表已经应验；所以在基督徒中间不能再被使用²；但其真理与实质仍保留在耶稣基督中，那些礼仪律所代表的已在他身上成全。同时，我们仍从律法与先知中提取见证，在福音的真道上坚固自己³，本着一切的诚实来约束我们的生活，按着神的旨意来荣耀他。（Translated by Rev. Charles Chao D.D.）

The Completion of the Ceremonial Laws

1. There are 3 different types of laws in the Bible.

a. The civil law (民法) – laws given to direct the nation of Israel alone. You can **learn principles** of these laws. For example, an Israelite was required to build a fence around the roof of his flat-topped house. So while you don't have houses that require fences on your roofs to prevent people from falling off, you need fences around your swimming pool. That is the principle.

b. The moral law (道德律) – **the 10 commands**... which are **permanent**. They will stand till heaven. This is why it is contemptible (可鄙的) that people now act like we only have 9 – ignoring the Sabbath law(安息日律法).

c. The ceremonial laws – pointed to (by ceremonies and symbols) the work of the coming Christ. **It is about the ceremonial laws that we want to talk about today.** These **are pictures**.

All three of these laws together were called the Torah (妥拉，律法)。

2. Ceremonial laws pictured Christ and his work in two ways?

a. Symbols. Symbols are representations. For example, in the temple you see the candlestick, the showbread (陈设饼), and the altar of incense. These three were symbols of the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Ark of the Covenant (约柜) was a symbol of Jesus. The breastplate (胸牌) of the High Priest symbolized Jesus carrying the world on his heart. The age and nature of the Passover lamb (逾越节羔羊) symbolized Christ as the proper sacrifice. Israel had to avoid certain meats – like ducks and pork. The meanings of these symbols were clear, but others were somewhat obscure.

b. Ceremonies. Ceremonies are actions of worship: Circumcision (割礼), making different kinds of offerings (献祭), following laws of ritual cleansing (洁净礼), and celebrating the Passover – the act of killing and eating the animal, special feast days (节期) and special Sabbaths. These all taught about Jesus Christ as well.

Signs and ceremonies served to lead Israel to, and to keep Israel faithful in, the expectation of the Messiah (Christ).

3. Are there pictures (symbols and ceremonies) in the New Testament? While the Old Testament has limited words, but many pictures, the New Testament has many words but limited pictures. We only have 2 symbols – baptism (洗礼) and the Lord's Supper (圣餐) – two simple non-bloody signs. **Yet the goal of both the Old and New Testaments is to speak of the work of Jesus Christ in one continuous story.** The New Testament explains what the Old Testament symbolized.

4. The NT does not have many symbols and ceremonies (pictures), yet the New Testament teaches that these symbols and ceremonies were copies and shadows of Christ. The Levitical priesthood was abolished when Christ came.

Hebrews 8:4-5 - For if He were on earth, **He would not be a priest**, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; 5 who **serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things**, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle 会幕. For He said, "See that you **make all things according to the pattern shown you on the Mountain.**"

And the copies had to be exact as possible.

Hebrews 10:1 - **For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come**, and not the very image of the things, **can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.**

And while copies of the sacrifice had to be repeated because they were not perfect, it is not so with Christ. There is no need for another sacrifice of Jesus.

5. These signs and ceremonies have now been completed or fulfilled in Jesus Christ. These signs and ceremonies were shadows. And since these symbols and ceremonies were shadows, they would obviously have passed away. Shadows disappear when light comes! Do we have proof of this? The writer of Hebrews points out that Jesus had to do God's will (fulfill the symbols and ceremonies) **that the new law might take its place**. This "new law" (or administration of the "new law" no longer requires symbols and ceremonies, but trusting in Christ's work (faith)... instead of having the priest make sacrifices.

Hebrews 10:9 - then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." **He takes away the first that He may establish the second [covenant].**

Galatians 5:2 - Indeed I, Paul, say to you that **if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.**

Why would Christ profit you nothing? The laws, like feast days and food laws, have passed away as well, but because Christ became YOUR circumcision, you benefit greatly from him.

Colossians 2:16-17 - So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, **but the substance is of Christ.** (16 所以不拘在饮食上, 或节期、月朔、安息日, 都不可让人论断你们。17 这些原是后事的影子; 那形体却是基督。)

So sacrifices, circumcision, and observation of special feast days are not to be observed any more because they have been completed by Christ. Ceremonies and symbols have done their jobs...they led Christians in the Old Testament to the cross.

Hebrews 10:14 - For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. (因 为他一次献祭, 便叫那得以成圣的人永远完全。)

6. By the way, Christ also fulfilled the moral law...

Matthew 5:17 - "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

7. This means that you don't have to light any candles or wear special clothes to worship. Come, listen to preaching about Christ's work, sing about Christ's work, and pray for blessings from Christ's work and confess your sins. You do not have to take an animal to the priest if you have sinned. **And this is why you can eat pork and Peking duck for dinner...** these signs and symbols have passed.

The Continuation of the Principles of the Ceremonial Laws

1. While you don't have to participate in these OT ceremonies and symbols, you can learn from them. By these symbols and ceremonies can learn in an illustrative way about Christ's life and work for you. So do not ignore the ceremonies and symbols.

2. Specifically, you can learn from the symbols and ceremonies of the Old Testament.

Consider some specific examples. But there are many others...

a. You can learn of Christ's purity, his perfection, his ministry for 3 ½ years, the preservation of all of his bones, and the wholeness of his sacrifice from the Passover ceremonial lamb.

b. You can learn how to be saved from your sins from looking at the Old Testament ceremonies. The sins and trespass offerings, with all the blood, remind you of what you deserved.

c. While you don't have to sacrifice an animal before worship as the Old Testament priest did, you learn to focus on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for you when you worship.

d. While you don't have to be circumcised today, you can focus on circumcision of your heart and learn to put-off uncleanness.

3. The Roman Catholics continue to sacrifice Christ daily, as the animals were daily sacrificed for sins in the Old Testament. This is a return to Judaism (犹太教) – where worship is filled with symbols and ceremonies. This is called the Eucharist (天主教的圣餐礼). The Eucharist demands priests...rather than pastors. But if Christ has fully paid for the sins of the world, why does he need to be daily sacrificed (每日被献祭) in attempt to please God? The Roman Catholic Eucharist is an abominable (令人憎恶的) sin that robs Christ of his glory. Never participate in this perversion (堕落) of Christ's sacrifice... never attend a Eucharist.

4. In error, the Anabaptists (重洗派) in the past, and even today, take the opposite extreme view to the Roman Catholic by mostly ignoring the ceremonies of the Old Testament. Most sermons are based on the New Testament. But since all the Old Testament promises are fulfilled in Christ, you need to study the promises of the Old Testament to better worship Christ. And one more serious mistake: Arminians and other Anabaptists treat the Lord's Supper and baptism purely as symbols without seeing them as the covenant signs (圣约的记号) and means of grace.

Conclusion:

Christ completed (fulfilled) all the symbols (candles, showbread, etc) and ceremonies (sacrifices, feasts, etc.) of the Old Testament. And there is no greater visible picture of this completion of the ceremonies of the Old Testament than when the curtain (帐幕) in the temple was torn in two when Jesus was crucified and access to the Holiest place (至圣所) in the temple was opened to all. The one act was symbolic of all those ceremonies being fulfilled in Jesus. And Christ's willingness to do this for you started with **Christ's love for you.**

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ, don't dismiss the Old Testament – especially those chapters that have lots of instruction about signs and ceremonies. Don't be scared of them. **Love them. Read them.**

Learn of the nature and work of Jesus Christ. Ask questions about what you read if you don't know. Do the research. If you do this, **you will grow in appreciation of Christ's work and be a blessing to the Lord and to your neighbor.** When you learn of Christ's fulfillment of the OT ceremonies it will make you worship Christ better. Will you promise today to work study these signs and ceremonies more?

Finally, if you are not Christian, let me remind you that **Jesus gave his life for his children.** He prayed when he was on earth and he continues to pray that God will bring his children into his kingdom. **If you hear a voice telling you today to surrender to Jesus Christ,** ask him to make you child. Don't delay, come to him and find rest – rest forevermore.