

Belgic Confession 25–What about those OT ceremonies and sacrifices?

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Some people have no interest in the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. They view them as “Old” Testament and therefore not relevant or maybe less relevant than the “New Testament.” But ceremonial laws teach very important things of who Jesus is, what he did for you, and by implication, how you must respond to him. So you must make the effort to properly understand the ceremonial laws. So listen to God’s specific instruction regarding the ceremonial laws.

Our headings are:

The Completion of the Ceremonial Laws

The Continuation of the Principles of the Ceremonial laws

Our goals are: **That, through pictures, you will see your salvation through Jesus, and that the more you see it, 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.

The Completion of the Ceremonial Laws

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

a. The civil or national laws were given to direct the nation of Israel alone. You can learn **principles** of these laws. For example, Israelites were required to **build a fence around the roof** of their flat-topped houses. There they would sleep during the summer months when it was very hot. The principle behind that was to keep people safe so they didn’t fall off. Today, using that principle, you might be required to **build a fence around your swimming pool**. You must keep people safe. So you use the **principle** of the national law.

b. The moral law – the 10 commands are for all people for all times. These are **permanent**. They will stand until you go to heaven. This is why it is contemptible when people act like we only have 9 – ignoring the Sabbath law. The Lord Jesus fulfilled all of God’s law...but you are still bound to always keep them. These commands **lead you to Christ** when you see your sins, they **guide you in how you live** after you become a Christian, and they form the **basis of laws by which a society is run**.

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.

c. The ceremonial laws –pointed to the life and death of Christ. It is about the ceremonial laws that we want to talk about today.

2. Ceremonial laws pictured Jesus Christ's work (life and death) in 2 ways?

a. Symbols. Symbols were representations. For example, in the temple there were the candlestick, the showbread, and the altar of incense. These 3 were symbols of the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Ark of the Covenant was a symbol of Jesus.

The breastplate of the High Priest symbolized Jesus carrying the world on his heart.

The Passover lamb symbolized Christ as the proper sacrifice.

Israel had to avoid certain meats – like ducks and pork – symbols of uncleanness.

The meanings of these symbols were mostly clear, but there are some that require some digging...like the Passover lamb that was killed in its 4th day of separation.

b. Ceremonies. Ceremonies were actions of worship. There were circumcision, bringing and making different kinds of offering and sacrifices, ritual cleansing, and the Passover. Like the symbols, these also taught about Jesus' life, death, and the results of his life and death.

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

3. Are there pictures (symbols and ceremonies) in the New Testament as well?

Of course. But naturally there were more in the Old Testament where Christ was being prefigured. In the New Testament there are 2 symbols – baptism and the Lord's Supper– 2 simple non-bloody signs which, like all symbols and ceremonies, also speak of Christ's work, but looking back to this life and death. It would be illogical to continue to use the same pictures when there is a clearer completed picture.

(Who would use black and white photos to show a beautiful garden?)

4. Further, the signs had to change because the old signs were no longer appropriate, having been completed in Jesus.

These signs and ceremonies were shadows (black and white pictures). And since these symbols and ceremonies were shadows, they would obviously have passed away when light (beautiful color pictures) came. Shadows disappear when light comes!

5. Do we have biblical proof that these symbols and ceremonies have been completed and therefore not to be used today?

The Bible 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 bloody symbols and complicated ceremonies.

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].

Consider circumcision which is no longer required because Christ fulfilled what circumcision symbolized.

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? You don't have to be circumcised because Christ became YOUR circumcision. So you profit greatly from him.

Colossians 2:11 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

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

Colossians 2:**16** 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.**

Further, the Old Testament sacrifices **had to be repeated** because they were not perfect, but it is not so with Christ. There is no need for another sacrifice of Jesus. (Read all of Hebrews 10)

Hebrews 10:14 - **For by one offering** He has **perfected forever** those who are being sanctified.

6. Furthermore, the Levitical priesthood, the ones who performed those signs and ceremonies for God's people, had to be abolished when Christ came, as Christ had a better priesthood.

Christ's priesthood was permanent and he replaced the temporary priesthood. Look at Christ's priesthood.

Hebrews 7:17 For He testifies: "**You are a priest forever** According to the order of Melchizedek." **23** Also there were many priests, because they were **prevented by death from continuing.** **24** But He, because He continues forever, has an **unchangeable priesthood.**

Hebrews 9:11 But **Christ came as High Priest** of the good things to come, with the **greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands**, that is, not of this creation. **12 Not with the blood of goats** and calves, but with **His own blood** He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having **obtained eternal redemption.** **13** For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, **14**

how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, **cleanse your conscience from dead works** to serve the living God? [24] For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to **appear in the presence of God for us**; 25 not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another — 26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; **but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.**

So the ceremonies had to change! They were no longer necessary.

7. This means that I don't have to kill animals for myself and for you every day, we don't have to burn incense 24 hours a day, and we don't have to wear special clothes to worship.

So come, listen to preaching about Christ's work, sing about Christ's work, pray for blessings from Christ's work, and confess your sins. Don't bring an animal to me if you sin. Enjoy **pork and Peking duck for dinner**... And if you sin, confess your sin by pleading Christ's death as your punishment.

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 in an illustrative way about Christ's life and work for you.

So do not ignore the ceremonies and symbols. Watch baptisms. Eat at the Lord's Table.

2. Specifically, consider some lessons from the symbols and ceremonies of the Old Testament

a. You can learn of Christ's purity, his perfection, his ministry for 3 ½ years, the innocence of the Lamb of God by the civil authorities, 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, but how your sins were put on the Lamb of God, your substitute.

c. While I don't have to sacrifice an animal before worship as the OT priest did, you learn to focus on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for you when you worship. This is the purpose of the Lord's Supper and baptism. This is why we preach so much about the cross!

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. Roman Catholics continue to sacrifice Christ daily, just as the animals were daily sacrificed for sins in the Old Testament.

This is a return to Judaism— where worship was filled with symbols and ceremonies. The

Roman Catholics call this the Eucharist. **The Eucharist demands priests rather than pastors.** But if Christ, our eternal High Priest, has **fully paid for our sins, why does he need to be daily sacrificed** in attempt to please God? The Roman Eucharist is an abominable sin that robs Christ of his glory. Never participate in this perversion of Christ's sacrifice... Warn those who do!

4. Anabaptists in the past, and many even today, take the opposite extreme view to Roman Catholics.

a. They try to avoid all ceremonies and anything that promotes order. So they avoid taking oaths and they treat the Lord's Supper as purely ceremonial with no spiritual nourishment. And because they reject baptismal regeneration as the Roman Catholics, they reject any spiritual good that comes from baptism. They see baptism of a child as evil.

b. Most of their 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. Keep in mind that they are largely ignoring 2/3 of the Bible when they ignore the Old Testament.

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 in the temple was torn in two when Jesus was crucified and **access to the Holiest place in the temple was opened to all.** The one act was symbolic of 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:

1. 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.

2. If you do this, you will grow in appreciation of Christ's work and be a blessing to the Lord, his church, and your neighbor. When you learn of Christ's fulfillment of the OT ceremonies you will **worship Christ better.**

3. Will you promise today to study these signs and ceremonies more?

Finally, if you are not Christian, let me remind you 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 calling you today to surrender to Jesus, ask him to make you child. Don't delay, come to him and find rest – rest forevermore.