

The Need for Law

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Imagine you are one of the Israelites recently delivered from Egypt, one of the multitudes following Moses in the great Exodus. You saw God's incredible power with your own eyes. You were overwhelmed when He rolled back the waters of the Red Sea allowing your people to cross on dry land. When safely on the other side, you saw those mighty waters come together, overwhelming the terrified Egyptian soldiers. You tasted the manna God sent from Heaven and your thirst was satiated with water flowing from a rock at His command. You saw God's power to save and heal. You also saw His power to destroy and kill. Now you are standing before God's mountain—Mt. Sinai! It is shrouded in cloud and smoke, as if from a mighty furnace. There is lightning and thunder. The great mountain itself shakes and trembles. You too are trembling. Your heart feels as if it will jump from your chest. You fall to your face with the others, crying out to Moses: "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Exodus 20:19). What an incredible day when the Almighty sat upon that gigantic throne of granite and gave laws to His covenant people.

God's laws were operating instructions from the Creator. On this occasion, God did not use the voice of a prophet, but spoke with His own voice. He did not employ a scribe's pen, but wrote with His own finger upon the tables of stone. He wrote the Ten Commandments, His moral laws.

You are lying in the dust before the smoking, flaming, trembling mountain of God. You would never consider breaking one of those laws. You know what would happen if you did. Like the Israelites who followed Moses out of Egypt some 3,500 years ago feared and respected God and His laws because they saw the consequences of disobedience, so too, would you.

But since then, countless men and nations hurled themselves against them. The remnants of destruction are all around in hospitals, asylums, prisons, battlefields, and back alleys of the world. What was true thousands of years ago is true today. You cannot break the law of God; you can only break yourself against it! Families are shattered; once-safe neighborhoods are victimized by violence and crime. Moral absolutes are quickly discarded when they hamper

man's desires. Sometimes it appears our whole society is determined to turn away from God's laws. The results are dramatic and unpleasant. People act as if God's laws are passé—a relic of a long forgotten era. In truth, they are the lynchpin holding society together.

Alabama Supreme Court Justice Roy Moore was forced to remove a monument featuring the Ten Commandments from his courthouse. In fact, Justice Moore himself was removed from the bench. What a colossal blunder! If possible, I would require the posting of the commandments in every courthouse in North America—and not only in North America, but all over the world. I would also insist on posting them in every public school—not because New Testament Christianity is based in adherence to this Old Testament law given specifically to the Israelites, but because it is one more attempt to remove God from public view.

A song from the late 1960's was a big hit for a group called The Fifth Dimension. The song was entitled "Aquarius." Again and again it proclaimed, "This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius." It spoke about the "love and understanding" that would be so much a part of everything as the world moved into a wonderful new era. In 1969 that sounded like an anthem of optimism. Today it sounds like a sad pathetic joke. What has this "age of love and understanding" brought? It brought neighborhoods where people are afraid to go out. It brought gang violence, terrorism, and drive-by shootings involving children as young as twelve and thirteen. It brought the tragedy of Columbine High, and so many other shootings in schools and churches throughout the United States. It brought the decimation of the family. You can think of many additional ways society regressed in the past few decades and even in the last few years. Our society defiantly turned away from God's law; as a result, our world became more unstable, frightening, and dangerous. You cannot break God's law; you can only break yourself against it!

The reason this age of "love and understanding" never materialized is those trumpeting its arrival did not know God or His laws. They envisioned a world where we throw off the restraint of "old-fashioned" morality, forget about God, and live in complete peace, freedom, and harmony. They did not realize God gave His laws for a reason. His desire has never been to hold us back or prevent our having a good time. He gave His laws knowing we can achieve our full potential only when we follow them. Our potential is not "enlightened fulfillment"; our potential is to become obedient sons and daughters.

Dr. Paul Johnson, an eminent historian, wrote a book entitled *Modern Times* chronicling the events of the 20th century. He says one of the most important events of the 20th century was the publication in 1905 of Albert Einstein's theory of relativity. Dr. Johnson noted that ever since the theory's acceptance in the world of physics, others have tried to make it work in virtually every discipline, including ethics and religion. It has been a gigantic experiment testing whether or not man can live without absolutes. The answer is "Yes, man can live without absolutes, but not very well." Do not think I am blaming society's slide into anarchy and relativism on Albert Einstein. The great physicist expressed his fear of where he saw this movement heading when he said, "Relativity applies to physics, not ethics."

For much of the 20th century, people listened to the voice of Karl Marx. He insisted man is not controlled by God's absolutes, but by economic factors. They nodded agreement with Friedrich Nietzsche's proclamation "God is dead," and therefore, the only thing controlling man is the quest for power. Men marveled at the wisdom of Sigmund Freud, who maintained man is controlled by sexual desire and not God's laws, and Charles Darwin, who vowed the only law that mattered was "the survival of the fittest."

What is left of their legacy nearing the end of the first decade of the 21st century? The communist empire built on the teachings of Karl Marx is in shambles—a bitter, failed experiment, leaving behind a sordid history of torture, murder, genocide, corruption, and betrayal of the innocent. What happened to Friedrich Nietzsche, the man whose theories gave rise to the secular religion of humanism—elevating man into the position of God? He lived the last years of his life in a mental institution. Sigmund Freud is no longer revered in psychological circles. In fact, his theories are considered passé by most contemporary psychologists. Sadly, it is too late to undo the damage his theories unleashed in the sexual revolution that perverted one of God's great gifts to mankind. What of Darwin? His views have been largely discarded by many scientists working in genetics. Why? They do not fit the facts. Yet millions go on blindly believing the discredited theory of evolution rather than accept the truth that there is a God who created the universe.

God's laws are not relative. They are absolute, immutable, immovable, and inviolate. This is borne out by thousands of years of history. "Well, didn't Jesus die to do away with the Law?" Yes and no. Read carefully what He said (Matthew 5:17-19):

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of Heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of Heaven.

To understand what Jesus taught, we must understand that when God spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai, He gave three kinds of law.

Civil laws were laws of government for Israel. There was no legislature or parliament in Israel to pass laws or make amendments to existing laws. Israel was a theocracy and God was the legislator. In the Old Testament, civil laws are easily recognized because they mention the punishment incurred when broken, such as a fine or execution. No one could plead ignorance. If you broke a civil law and were caught, you could count on swift punishment. What happened to Israel's civil laws in the Old Testament? When Rome destroyed the theocracy of Israel in 70 A.D., the civil laws were simultaneously abolished.

Ceremonial laws are also recorded in the first five books of the Old Testament. They dealt with sin offerings, trespass offerings, and all the offerings and sacrifices of the Jewish religious system. All of these sacrifices foreshadowed Christ, the Messiah who was coming. Through faith in the atoning death of the coming Messiah, a Hebrew of the Old Covenant could obtain forgiveness. When Christ gave His life "as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28), that changed. There was no need for the ceremonial sacrifices because Jesus paid the price for our sins once for all (Hebrews 10:11-14). There was no longer a need to offer sacrifices looking in faith to the coming Messiah. When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, he said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" (John 1:29). That is exactly who He is, the Lamb whose blood was shed so we might have forgiveness of sins—forever. When Christ died and rose again, the requirements of the ceremonial laws were cancelled. There is no longer a need for animal sacrifices or the other ceremonial components of the Law. In Christ we are saved, forgiven, and purified through the blood of Jesus.

The moral laws were embodied in nine of the "Ten Commandments." The single ceremonial law of the ten is Sabbath keeping. The moral laws represent God's character and His

moral character does not change—ever. It is ridiculous to think that 3,500 years ago God opposed stealing but has since changed His mind. It is ludicrous to say adultery offended Him then, but it is of no importance now. It is insane to argue He opposed homosexuality then but supports gay marriage today. Yet, this is precisely how many people think. They view God as having “mellowed” over the years—like a parent who was stricter with his older children than with the younger. They are wrong. God is consistent, He is fair, and His character is firm forever. He is the same today as 3,500 years ago. As He is now, so will he be four billion years from now. Thus we find frequent references to God’s moral laws in the New Testament. When Paul gives a wonderful summation of the Gospel, he ends with, “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law” (Romans 3:31).

A Greek word for “law” is *nomos*, and those who say the law has no place in the Christian life are called Antinomians, which means “against the law.” We call them “outlaws” in Texas. Since the 1st century some have argued, “We are saved by grace through faith, so we are free to do whatever we want.” I like to ask, “Having made a profession of faith, is it your desire to please the Lord and show love out of gratitude?” They answer, “You can be assured of that—absolutely.” My next question is, “Can you name one thing you could do more pleasing to God than obeying His commandments?” When the question is met with silence, and it usually is, I remind them of what the Lord said in John 14:15: “If you love Me, keep My commandments.”

The Lord does not want us inventing ways to please Him. Like most fathers, God wants us to show our love by respecting Him and living in obedience to His commandments. We love the Lord, obey the Gospel, and desire to please Him in everything we do. We do not obey out of fear, like slaves avoiding the Master’s lash. We obey because we are children of a loving Father, and we want to please Him. Let us strive for a heart like David’s when he wrote, “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psalm 119:97).