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The Lawful Use Of The Law

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"Wherefore the law is holy and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Romans 7:12).

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10).

"But we know that the law is good if a man use it lawfully" (I Tim. 1:8).

The first of these texts describes the character of the law—it is holy and just and good. It is holy in that it reflects the holy mind of God and reveals what is pleasing to His holiness. It is just, which means that all the requirements of the law are right and proper. God, as Creator and source of every blessing, had the perfect right to give to moral creatures all the commands in the law. It is good, which means that the goodness of God is reflected in the law. There is nothing in the law to work a hardship on man considered as a creature. Obedience to the law of God means human happiness; disobedience has brought ruin and misery. Every tear and heartache, every pain and every death, can be traced ultimately to disobedience to God's law.

The second text describes the condition of the sinner who tries to be justified or saved by the keeping of the law of God. He gets a curse instead of salvation. A sinless person under law lives and enjoys freedom from the curse as long as he is obedient. The hope of

any person while under law is in obedience to the law. This was the hope of Adam and Eve in their original state. They lived and enjoyed the blessings of God as long as they were obedient. But the day they sinned, that day they died. They died to holiness and became depraved in nature—a nature opposed to God, and the sentence of death was read in their ears. From that time, the law of God has had no sinless men to deal with. It has sinners under its authority and to resort to efforts to keep the law as the way of salvation is the way of death. This is because the law requires perfect and perpetual obedience, and no sinful man can render such obedience. The law cannot save because of the weakness of the flesh.

The third text speaks of the proper use of the law. The law is good if it is used lawfully. In the light of our second text, to use the law as a means of salvation is to use it unlawfully. The law is good as to its character, but it can be put to a bad use.

We have many illustrations of the bad use of good things. Money is a good thing if properly used, but the love of it is the root of all kinds of evil. Money ill-gotten and ill-spent has brought much harm to men. The automobile is a good thing, in itself considered, but many use it in the service of Satan. Power is a good thing if it is used right, but the abuse of power has led to war and bloodshed. Power is often used to crush the weak. Ambition is all right except when permeated with selfishness, as much of it is. Paul was ambitious to please Christ and to help men.

WHAT IS THE LAW OF GOD?

Sometimes when the law of God is spoken of, the whole of the Mosaic dispensation is intended as, for example, in Luke 16:16, we read that "The law and the prophets were until John." And sometimes the Ten Commandments are meant. Jesus summed up the law in two commandments, saying, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," and "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:37-39). Love is the fulfilling of the law, and the law includes every duty we owe to God and to men.

The law of God is found in the Bible. We go to His Word to find what is our duty. The Holy Bible is our statute book. Conscience is not a sufficient guide in matters of faith and practice. We cannot depend upon it to teach us our duty to God and men. Paul's conscience taught him to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus. "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). Christ told His disciples that the time would come, "... that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (John 16:2). Conscience has been compared to a sun-dial. The sun-dial can be trusted to tell the time of day in the light of the sun, but at night in the light of the moon or by a lamp, the sun-dial will tell all kinds of time. Conscience can be trusted when lighted by the word of God, but in the light of public opinion or human judgment, conscience will endorse that which is wrong.

THE RIGHT USE OF THE LAW

There is a proper use of the law to be made by the sinner, and blessed is the man who has learned how to use the law lawfully.

1. The law is rightly used when it convicts us of sin. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). The law reveals sin but does not provide a remedy for it. The law is like a lantern on a dark night. The lantern reveals the sticks and stones in the path, but it does not remove them. The law is like a mirror before one's face. The mirror will reveal any dirt that may be on the face, but the mirror cannot be used as a wash basin. The law is like the plumb-line let down by a crooked wall. The plumb-line will show that the wall is crooked, but it cannot be used as a trowel to make the wall straight. Paul had an exalted opinion of himself until the law shined into his heart, and then he saw himself a sinner under the sentence of death. In Romans 7:9, we read: "For I was alive without the law once: but when the

commandment came, sin revived, and I died." No sinner has ever used the law properly until he takes it by the Spirit's power and blows out his brains of self-righteousness.

2. The law is lawfully used when it convicts us of our helplessness. Men are not only sinful, they are also helpless to deliver themselves from their sinful state. They are utterly without strength to do anything good to merit salvation. Men cannot be saved by keeping the law because of the weakness of the flesh. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3).

3. The law is rightly used when it convicts us of our condemnation. Every unbeliever is condemned by the law, but every unbeliever does not feel his condemnation. Just as a criminal, by referring to the statute book, would only read his sentence, so we use the law lawfully when we read in it the sentence of death against us.

4. The law is used properly when it becomes a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:24-26). The law shows us that we cannot be saved by personal obedience, and thus shuts us up to faith in Christ. If we cannot save ourselves, we must look to another to save us. The law prepares us for the gospel by showing us that we are cursed. The gospel saves us by showing that Christ redeemed us from the curse. The law shows us what we are; the gospel reveals what Christ is. The law reveals a sinner in need of salvation; the gospel reveals Christ as the One mighty to save. The law shows me that there is no hope in self; the gospel reveals the good hope in Christ. As well try to produce heat by looking at snow, light by looking at darkness, wealth by looking at poverty, health by looking at disease, or life by looking into the grave, as to try to find any hope by looking at self. The law has destroyed the spirit of self-righteousness in me that I might rest in the righteousness provided by God in Christ, who was made to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. (II Cor. 5:21).

VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Under the moral law of God, the sinner—every sinner—faces certain and inevitable defeat; but under grace there is certain and glorious victory through Christ. Christ is the Champion who can meet the dragon of sin and pull his sting. The poor sinner need not despair; there is hope in

Christ. There is help for the helpless and hope for the hopeless. There is One mighty to save. There is a specific for sin; the blood of the Lamb for sinners slain.

Salvation is through a satisfied law. If the strength of sin is the law, then the law must be satisfied and justice vindicated, else God is either unjust or impotent. If He is unwilling to enforce His law, He is unjust; if He is unable to enforce His law, He is not the Almighty. Violated law is the only source of danger; satisfied law is the only source of security. He who saves us must make us right with the moral law of God. Christ did this:

1. By a redemptive death. "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal. 4:4). And again, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). Jesus, as surety of the better covenant, was made responsible for our sins, and therefore, bare the guilt of our sins in His own body on the tree. The believer in Christ can look back to Calvary's cross, and see the sentence of death against himself executed on the person who stood for him. The execution of a criminal condemned to die is either before him or behind him. The believer can rejoice that it is behind him, having been inflicted upon Christ who was punished in his place. The believer can reckon himself dead to sin, because dead to the law, which is the strength of sin; and dead to the law through the body of Christ who died in his stead.

2. By a righteous life. Men are sinners and lost because they are unrighteous. They are unrighteous because they have not obeyed the law of God. And they must have a perfect righteousness to be saved. Christ provided this righteousness, and it is made over to the believer. "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. 10:4). He was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

It must be emphasized that Christ's righteousness is only for those who renounce their own righteousness and look to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. He that believeth not shall be damned. Oh, sinner, look to Christ and live; and look now!

Verily, verily, I say unto you,
He that heareth my word, and
believeth on him that sent me,
hath everlasting life, and shall
not come into condemnation; but
is passed from death unto life.

--- Jesus

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