

God's Word: The Law

In a madhouse there exists no law.

—John Clare

If we are in a great hurry, we may not appreciate traffic laws. If we are buying a home or opening a business, we may dislike existing zoning laws. Rules and regulations can sometimes seem highly inconvenient. Most people, however, recognize their importance. In fact, every society in the world has some form of law, some code of right and wrong. Without laws the world would become a madhouse.

1. What laws do you most frequently find inconvenient? Can you think of a good reason for the existence of these laws? What consequences would result if they were repealed?

Holy Legality

2. Read Ephesians 5:15–17; Psalm 40:8; and Romans 7:12. With what do the Old and New Testament writers associate the Law of God? How does Scripture therefore describe this Law?

3. Compare Exodus 31:18 and Romans 2:14–15. Who is able to know God's Law? In what different ways do people come to know the Law?

4. Read and compare Ecclesiastes 7:20; 1 John 3:4; and James 2:10. Though all people are conscious of the Law, what do these passages say about our ability to keep the Law?

5. Read 1 Timothy 1:8–11. What is one of the uses for which God's Law has been given?

6. Compare Romans 3:20 and Romans 7:7. What is a second use for which God's Law has been given?

7. The Word of God not only warns against and reveals sin; it also clearly states the consequences of sin. Read Deuteronomy 27:26 and Romans 6:23. How serious are the consequences for breaking God's Law?

8. The Law of God may be used in different ways. There is one thing, however, for which the Law is not to be used. Compare Galatians 3:10–11 and Galatians 5:4. What does God not intend His Law to do?

Crime and Punishment

If our civil laws can at times seem burdensome, the divine Law of God can seem even more so! No one escapes its jurisdiction. No one escapes accusation for breaking this Law. And, if we were left to our own devices, no one would escape its penalties.

9. As you meditate on the Law of God—its nature, use, and consequences—what effects does it have on you? What emotions or reactions does the Law produce?

10. Read Galatians 3:13. Remembering what the Law can and cannot do, what comfort does Paul offer those who have not kept God's Law?

Utter Silence

Paul informs us that the Law speaks “so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God” (Romans 3:19)—*every* mouth, the *whole* world. Though every society throughout the world has some form of law, not all people recognize the Law of the God who created this world.

11. Reread Romans 2:14–15. As you encounter those who do not know or do not believe the Bible, consider how you might begin to discuss both Law and Gospel with them.

Comparisons

Eastern Orthodox: “What is necessary in order to please God and to save one's own soul? In the first place, a knowledge of the true God, and a right faith in Him; in the second place, a

life according to faith, and good works” (*The Longer Catechism of the Eastern Church*, question 3).

Lutheran: “We believe, teach, and confess that the Law is properly a divine doctrine, which teaches what is right and pleasing to God, and reproves everything that is sin and contrary to God’s will. For this reason, then, everything that reproves sin is, and belongs to, the preaching of the Law” (Epitome of the Formula of Concord V 2–3).

Reformed/Presbyterian: “God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it; and endued him with power and ability to keep it. . . . Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others” (*The Westminster Confession of Faith*, ch. 19.1, 6).

Roman Catholic: “The holy Synod declares first, that, for the correct and sound understanding of the doctrine of Justification, it is necessary that each one recognize and confess, that, whereas all men had lost their innocence in the prevarication of Adam . . . free-will, attenuated as it was in its powers, and bent down, was by no means extinguished in them” (*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Session 6, Decree on Justification).

Baptist: “We believe that man was created in holiness, under the law of his Maker; but by voluntary transgression fell from that holy and happy state; in consequence of which all mankind are now sinners, not by constraint, but choice; being by nature utterly void of that holiness required by the law of God, positively inclined to evil; and therefore under just condemnation to eternal ruin, without defense or excuse” (*The New Hampshire Baptist Confession*, article 3).

Wesleyan/Methodist: “Although the law given from God by Moses, as touching ceremonies and rites, does not bind Christians, nor ought the civil precepts thereof of necessity be received in any commonwealth, yet, notwithstanding, no Christian whatsoever is free from the obedience of the commandments which are called moral” (*Methodist Articles of Religion*, article 6).

Liberal: “We cannot define Christian ethics in terms of a church-controlled society. Neither can we regard Christian duty as identical with biblical precepts. . . . Christian ethics should be defined as the determination of the duties of a modern Christian living in the modern world. To define it in terms of an ethical system belonging to another age is to fail to make Christianity ethical” (Gerald Birney Smith in *A Guide to the Study of the Christian Religion*, p. 570).

Point to Remember

I desire to do Your will, O my God; Your law is within my heart. Psalm 40:8

To prepare for “God’s Word: The Gospel,” read 1 Corinthians 15:1–4.