



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Law and Grace

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SELECTED SCRIPTURES

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Our legislators, elected officials, and government leaders have a daunting responsibility – proposing, passing, interpreting, and enforcing the laws that affect every citizen of our state and of our nation. In a constitutional republic, they have the authority to do this because it has been given to them by the citizens. The making of laws is obviously the focus of much of what goes on here in the statehouse. The title “legislator” comes from the Latin words for “law bringer”, hence our descriptive title of “lawmaker”.

Much of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, has to do with the record of God giving His Law and with His people’s response to it. God has the authority to give us laws because He is our creator. The universe is not a democracy. We cannot “vote God out of office” or “amend” His laws because we do not like them. Indeed, as the creator and ruler of the universe, God is the “Great Lawmaker”.

In order to properly understand the Bible, we must realize that all of it points to Jesus and His saving work on our behalf. We must understand the relationship between LAW and GRACE.

“The Law” is referenced many times in the Bible. The first five books of the Old Testament are designated “The Law”. Psalm 119, the longest chapter of the Bible, relates the writer’s love for God’s law. The Apostle Paul wrote a great deal in his letters of how believers should understand God’s law and how it relates to us today (Romans 7, Galatians 3-4.). The Bible also has much to say about GRACE – the undeserved favor of God demonstrated in forgiveness and redemption. It may seem these truths are in conflict with each other. So, it is vital if we are to rightly understand the message of the Bible, that we understand **Law** and **Grace**.

WHAT IS “THE LAW”?

“The law” is spoken of many times throughout the Bible. It may refer to the whole revelation of the will of God (Psalm 1:2; 19:7). It is used to refer to the first five books of the Old Testament (Luke 24:27, 44). It is used to describe the entirety of the law God gave to the His people as recorded in Leviticus and repeated in Deuteronomy. It may also describe specifically the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). As our creator, God has the right to set before us how we are to live.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW?

In his letters, the Apostle Paul had a great deal to say about the law. In 1 Timothy 1:8-9 we find a vitally important statement:

But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious...

1 Timothy 1:8-9

He describes the law as good, **if it is used lawfully**. This clearly implies that the law can be used unlawfully, or improperly. This brings up the question that is vital to properly understand the Bible. **How can the law of God be used unlawfully or improperly?** The answer is simple. We understand and use the law of God improperly when we see the keeping of God’s law as the means of being made right with Him. We do this when we answer the question “What does it mean to be a Christian?” or “What do we have to do to go to heaven?” by replying “by being a good person”. Unfortunately, this is how most people understand the message of the Bible. They believe being right with God entails striving to keep the Ten Commandments or to follow the teachings of Jesus. But if we properly understand the purpose of the law as revealed in the Bible, we realize this is not the case. John Newton, who knew much about God’s grace wrote: “*It is not proper to use the law to seek justification and acceptance with God by our obedience to it, because it is not appointed to this end*”. If we are to understand the message of the Bible, we must properly understand what the true purpose of the law is.

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY

THURSDAY, AUGUST 1, 12:00 NOON McMANUS CONFERENCE ROOM (MB 254)

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The Law Was Given to Reveal to Us the Majesty, Holiness, and Authority of God

Exodus 20:1 reminds us, ***“Then God spoke all these words”***. The law lays out what God demands of us. It is an expression of His own holiness and perfection. As creator, God has every right to say how His creation should exist. We are all under the jurisdiction of the authorities where we live or are present. As citizens of America, we are under the authority of the federal government. As residents of West Virginia, we fall under the authority of state leaders. While in Kanawha County we must adhere to county laws. And if in Charleston, we must follow this municipalities ordinances and authorities.

Albert Mohler describes this in a way with which those of you serving in the capitol might well identify:

“This is not Israel's legislation. The Ten Commandments are not the product of human creativity or a legislative assembly. There is no conference committee at Horeb and Sinai. There is no filibuster, and there is no bill-signing ceremony in the Rose Garden. This is God speaking to His people. There is no negotiation here. This is divine address.”

The Law Was Given to Show How Sinful We Are

The Bible makes it clear that the law was not given in order for us to keep it so that we could be right with God. Rather, it was given to show us how sinful we are and how far short we fall of God's glory. Paul makes this clear in several places. ***“Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions...”*** (Galatians 3:19). Paul describes this more fully in Romans 3:19-20:

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

Paul makes it clear, keeping the law and being a good person cannot save us. As he writes in Galatians 2:16: ***“...A man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in***

Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of¹the Law no flesh will be justified.”

Each of us can simply use the Ten Commandments as a test to see how sinful we really are. How many lies have we told? How often have we used God's name in vain? We may not have murdered, but how many times have we been angry in our hearts (Matthew 5:21). We may not have committed the physical act of adultery, but how often have we harbored lustful thoughts in our hearts? Or, we can look to what Jesus called the greatest commandments. Have we ever genuinely loved God with all our heart, soul, and mind, or have we ever really loved our neighbor as ourselves?

If we were to try to be right with God by keeping His law, how well would we have to keep it? PERFECTLY! Jesus told us, ***“You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”*** (Matthew 5:48). James warns us, ***“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.”*** (James 2:10).

Not only does the law set forth the standard of which we have all fallen short, it lays out for us the consequences of breaking God's law. In describing how God deals justly with each individual Ezekiel writes, ***“The person who sins will die”*** (Ezek. 18:17). Paul proclaims ***“The wages of sin is death”*** (Rom. 6:23). This is not just speaking of physical death which we all must endure, but eternal punishment in hell as well.

The Law was Given to Point Us to Christ

If by considering God's law we realize God's holiness and how greatly we have sinned against Him by breaking His law, this points us to our need for a Savior. Indeed, much of the Old Testament law's provision of sacrifices and offering pointed to what Christ would do for us in His perfect life and in His suffering and death on the cross. Paul writes of how ***“The Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.”*** (Galatians 3:24) In the same chapter Paul describes what Jesus did for us:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE” (Galatians 3:13)

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Jesus lived a perfect life, completely keeping and fulfilling God's law (Matt. 5:17). Yet He was willing to take the curse (punishment) of you and I who had broken God's law upon Himself as He suffered upon the cross. The innocent Lamb of God was offered up on our behalf (John 1:29). As a result, the punishment for our sin was placed upon Him, and the goodness of His perfect life can be given to us. This salvation is found only through faith – believing in Christ and His work as we repent and trust Him alone to save us.

The Law was Given as a Pattern for Holiness and Christian Living

While the Bible makes it clear that we are not saved or made right with God by keeping the law, God's commands do give us a pattern to follow in seeking to live lives pleasing to God. Paul wrote that "...Whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (Romans 15:4). This would certainly refer to the law as well as the historical accounts written in the Old Testament. As New Testament believers we may meditate upon the Ten Commandments and seek how we might apply them in our daily living during challenging times. We can contemplate the Old Testament sacrificial system and wonder at the work of Christ on our behalf. We can even consider the Old Testament laws that were given to the nation of Israel and consider how our lives as believers should be different from those who do not know Christ in the society and culture around us.

An Important Distinction

There is a vitally important distinction to keep in mind when reading and studying the Bible. It is the distinction of **LAW** and **GRACE**. The law is what God demands of us, what we are to **do**. The gospel is what God has **done** for us through the work of Jesus Christ. We notice quickly how the New Testament writers speak much of how believers ought to live (LAW). But they always base it on what Christ has done for us and who we are because of our relationship with Him (GRACE). We often read the Bible looking for rules to follow or steps for better living.

Those things are certainly there but they are only possible because of the life we can have because of what Christ has done for us.

In a sense, we might say that the LAW is the bad news. God has given us His standard which we must keep perfectly or face eternal punishment. The GRACE is the good news. Christ lived the perfect life which we could not. He died and rose again so that our sin could be forgiven. Now His goodness can be given to us. This really is the message of the whole Bible and keeping this distinction in mind will help us properly understand what God has revealed to us in His word.

Conclusion

What is our response to God's law and His Grace? That really depends up our view of the Great Lawmaker. When we recognize His majesty, glory, and holiness, we acknowledge His right to demand holiness of those He created. We quickly realize how far short we fall. This is the purpose of His law. Then we turn to God's grace to find the forgiveness and righteousness He has provided to us in Christ.

John Newton, the author of the hymn favorite *Amazing Grace*, wrote a lesser known song that well describes for us law and grace:

*Let us love and sing and wonder,
Let us praise the Savior's Name!
He has hushed the law's loud thunder,
He has quenched Mount Sinai's flame.
He has washed us with His blood,
He has brought us nigh to God.*

*Let us wonder grace and justice
Join and point to mercy's store
When through grace in Christ our trust is
Justice smiles and asks no more
He Who washed us with His blood
Has secured our way to God*