

# THE LAW IS GOOD

THE GOODNESS OF GOD 4

God's Law can teach us the good way of love.



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

The Law is Good  
The Goodness of God 4  
T. M. Moore  
Susie Moore, Editor and Finisher

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## Welcome to *The Law is Good*

Many Christians have somehow gotten the idea that the Law of God no longer applies to the life of faith.

This is of course wrong. Since the Law is holy and righteous and good, we should expect it to be a source of much help in our effort to bring the goodness of God to light in the land of the living.

But unless we embrace the Law, and devote ourselves to understanding and obeying it, we'll have only our own wits to guide us in loving God and our neighbors. And our own wits aren't up to the challenge.

We have nothing to fear from learning to delight in and love God's Law, or from letting it guide us into God's good path. In this study, we'll see how the goodness of God can be discerned in His Law, so that it can shape our lives for good.

*ReVision* studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 You May Have Missed This

*Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.* Romans 7.12

### *Seeking God's goodness*

In this series of studies we are trying to understand the goodness of God, and to learn about that goodness from as many sources as possible. We have been redeemed through Jesus Christ to do good works that glorify God (Eph. 2.10; Matt. 5.16). The Lord intends that we should be ready, diligent, and constant in doing good works, for by so doing we bring His goodness to light in the land of the living (Tit. 2.14, 3.1, 8, 14; Ps. 27.13).

But a life of good works will be difficult if we don't understand the nature of God's goodness.

We have seen that God alone is good, and that His goodness consists in the unity, holiness, harmony, order, creativity, and love which are shared by the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is good, and these are the primary attributes that define His goodness. God wants us to know His goodness, so He continuously reveals Himself and His goodness to us in the things He has made, both in the creation around us and in aspects of the culture people make and use each day. The psalmist encourages us to keep in mind that "The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD" (Ps. 33.5). If we can be more observant and discerning, we can discover the forms of God's goodness in creation and culture, and can emulate that goodness in our daily lives.

Our calling is to do good works, and thus to show the goodness of God to a world where genuine goodness is increasingly in short supply. Diligence in this must characterize all aspects of our daily life. If we can bring the goodness of God to light in all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities, and help others to see the goodness of the Lord in creation and culture, we can improve our witness for Christ, and salt our spheres of influence with a sense of the nearness of Christ and His Kingdom. This is the purpose for which we have been saved, and doing good is how we validate our claim to be followers of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2.8-10; Jms. 2.14-29; Heb. 6.9-12).

But this generation of believers is in danger of neglecting one of the most important sources of God's goodness. And that neglect is not only bad for the people around us, but for us who believe as well.

### *Dead and useless?*

It's now more than 40 years since, astonished, I first read the words of theologian Lawrence Richards, expressing the heart and mind of contemporary evangelicalism relative to the Law of God. In his book, *Creative Bible Study* – a best-seller at the time – Dr. Richards asked the question, "What, then, is the Christian's relationship to law?" – meaning the Law of God. He answered his question by saying, "The Christian has no relationship to law. For the Christian, the law is a dead and a useless thing."

Reading that, or hearing it from their pastors who read it, an entire generation of evangelical Christians breathed a sigh of relief. Finally! No more need to insist on unchanging moral norms! Now they were free to follow their spirits and live only in the grace of God! They were not under Law but under grace! No Pharisees here, that's for sure.

Those who held this view took Paul's declaration that we are not "under law" but are "under grace" (Rom. 6.14), wrested it from its immediate context of justification, and applied it across the board to our moral lives. Henceforth they would be free of any obligation to learn or obey the Law of God, and would instead be guided in all their morality by some vague notion of love. Of course, they would fall back on the Ten Commandments when expedient – as when indicting unbelievers for removing them from our schools –

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excepting, of course, the fourth commandment, from which most contemporary Christians have almost entirely broken free. But as for the rest of that large corpus of Biblical revelation, which the Bible itself treats as the acorn to the oak of Scripture, they have neglected, if not rejected it altogether.

Consequently, the Law of God, which Paul describes as holy and righteous and good, is scorned by the very people for whom it is intended. The Law of God teaches us how to love Him and our neighbors (Matt. 22.34-40). The Law of God is critical for seeking the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5.17-19). The Law of God liberates us from the blinding and binding power of sin (Jms. 2.8-13). The Law of God marks the path of love that Jesus walked, and that all must walk who would follow Him (1 Jn. 2.1-6; 5.1-3). The Law of God provided the framework within which the apostles ordered their churches (cf. 1 Cor. 5, 9; Jms. 2-5; 1 Jn. 5). The Law of God is the core curriculum of the Spirit, as He brings us into the presence of God's glory and transforms us into the image of Jesus Christ (Ezek. 36.26, 27; 2 Cor. 3.12-18). Neglecting the Law of God is a major cause for the decline of true and selfless love in the world; it licenses the progress of evil; and it threatens to render the prayers of Law-neglecting believers an "abomination" or, we might say, "a dead and a useless thing" (Matt. 24.12; Prov. 28.4, 9).

#### *Day and night*

It's no wonder the psalmist, echoing Moses, insisted that the righteous person, the one who embodies the goodness of God in all his ways, meditates on the Law of God day and night, hides it in his heart and embodies it in all his ways (Ps. 119.9-11; Deut. 6.1-9), keeps it diligently, delights in and loves it, and hastens to make sure his feet follow in its path (cf. Ps. 1; Deut. Ps. 119.4, 5, 35, 59, 60, 97).

If you are missing the Law of God in your relationship with Jesus, you are depriving yourself of a most important resource for bringing the goodness of God to light in the land of the living. The good works outlined in the Law of God are those "ordained of old" which God intends us to do in all our ways (Eph. 2.10). Yes, understanding the Law can be difficult. But we can learn from the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles how to read, study, and meditate in this most important corpus of Biblical literature, and thus we can discover the true freedom for goodness and love that God has prepared for us.

For, as Paul insisted, the Law of God is *good*. And in the lessons that follow in this series, we'll see just why that is so.

#### *For reflection*

1. Meditate on Psalm 1. How does the psalmist describe the righteous person's relationship to the Law of God? Does that describe your relationship?
2. Meditate on Matthew 5.17-19. Can we seek the Kingdom of God apart from a Psalm 1 approach to the Law of God? Explain.
3. Jesus said the Law shows us the way to love God and our neighbor, and James said we should all live within the teaching of the Law. How can the Law of God begin to have a more commanding presence in your walk with the Lord?

*Next steps – Preparation: Do you need to revisit your relationship to the Law of God? Review all the Scriptures mentioned in this article, then spend some time in prayer, listening for the Spirit to guide you in discovering a proper place for God's Law in your Christian life.*

## 2 Many Laws, One Law

*For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.* James 2.10

### *Laws and the Law*

In the Scriptures, various terms are used to refer to the Law of God. The Scriptures speak of the Law as precepts, rules, testimonies, statutes, ways, judgments, commandments, and word. We see this especially in Psalm 119, that remarkable poem of celebration and devotion to God and His Law. These different words suggest the many nuances of the Law, and they remind us that the one Law of God is made up of various *categories* of law, and those categories are made up of many *specific instructions*.

The Law of God is a tapestry of many threads, and all the threads, woven together in unity, contribute to the picture of divine goodness which the Law consistently presents.

The apostle James bears witness to the *unity* of God's Law. Because unity is a central feature of the goodness of God, we expect God's *good* Law to demonstrate unity as well.

So strong is the unity of God's Law that, as James explains, to violate one of the commandments of God is to violate them all. When we covet, we don't *just* covet. We want to possess something for our own happiness that belongs to someone else, so we have stolen from that neighbor, if only in our heart. When we covet, we look to something other than God to satisfy our soul. We make an idol out of a thing. We lie to ourselves about what we really need, and we stoke the fires of lust, which is the beginning of adultery. Coveting is the gateway to all sin, since when we covet, we turn our heart from the pure desire of God and His will to our own selfish interests. Coveting is thus an assault on all the commandments of God; the same is true when we lie, steal, lust, take the Lord's Name in vain, or transgress against His Day.

The Law of God is one Law, since it comes from one God, with the sole purpose of directing our steps in love for God and our neighbors.

### *Categories of Law*

The essence of the Law of God is the Ten Commandments. These are to the rest of God's Law as the United States Constitution is to the laws of the various States, and all local and case laws of every kind. The Ten Commandments define the parameters of what is required in loving God and our neighbors (Matt. 22.34-40). They encode the spiritual DNA of God in ten concise words, and they give shape and direction to our understanding of all subsequent Biblical law.

Two categories of laws, precepts, judgments, and so forth further elaborate the Ten Commandments and teach us how to carry out the requirements of God's love. First are the *ceremonial* or *religious* laws. These relate specifically to Israel's practice of worshiping God. They provide details concerning the duties of priests and Levites, the various kinds of sacrifices God required, and certain other religious practices – feasts, offerings, things devoted to God, and the like – by which the people of Israel reinforced their memory of the grace and mercy of God and expressed their devotion and obedience to Him.

All these ceremonial laws have found their fulfillment in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the witness of the writer of Hebrews (chapters 7-9). Since Christ is our great High Priest, has replaced the Tabernacle and Temple with His own Body, and is the final, once-for-all sacrifice and offering for sin, there is no longer any need for the ceremonial laws of the Old Covenant. To be sure, Christ has introduced ceremonial laws of His own, which in many ways fulfill the purpose of Old Testament ceremonial laws, which was to point to Christ and His redeeming work. I'm thinking here of baptism and the Lord's Supper, in particular. Further, just because the Old Covenant ceremonial laws have been set aside does not

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mean they do not yet hold principles from which we can draw in our worship and service to God. Paul makes this abundantly clear in 1 Corinthians 9.12-14.

A second category of Old Testament law remains valid as a source of guidance in loving God and our neighbors. These are the many *civil laws*, often stated in terms of case laws, that guided the everyday lives of the people of Israel in all their relationships, roles, and responsibilities. Not *all* these laws remain valid, and we do not expect to *interpret* these laws exactly as the people of Israel did. Subsequent sections of the Old Testament, together with the practice and teaching of Christ and the apostles, and the teaching work of the Holy Spirit, help us to understand the use we are to make of these statutes, precepts, judgments, and so forth. The body of Old Testament civil law holds many valuable and important principles to guide us in discovering and practicing the goodness of God in the land of the living.

#### *Goodness in unity*

The importance of the unity of God's Law can be seen in the differing uses of the Law that Satan and the Lord Jesus demonstrated during our Lord's temptation (Matt. 4.1-11). Satan tried to "cherry-pick" the Law to suit his own wicked purposes, latching on to a statute here and a testimony there to try to make Jesus, the *Giver* of divine Law, serve the devil's wicked ends. Jesus, however, appealing to a fuller understanding and more complete use of the Law, refuted the devil and sent him packing.

The Law of God is one Law, one body of divine revelation that holds together with complete integrity. It is a tapestry of divine goodness. The Law guides us in learning the good works of love that we have been redeemed to know and live (Eph. 2.10). It ill behooves us to neglect the Law; rather, we must become so rooted beside its flowing and life-giving stream (Ps. 1), that its goodness shines in us as the righteousness and life of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is Himself the end and objective toward which all the Law leads (Rom. 10.4), and the very embodiment of all the goodness of God.

#### *For reflection*

1. Meditate on Psalm 1. Why do you think Christians don't spend much time reading and meditating in God's Law?
2. That the Law of God has a basic *unity* suggests that we cannot benefit from *any* of the Law unless we have a growing understanding of it *all*. Explain.
3. What would you suggest as a reasonable approach to becoming more knowledgeable of and familiar with the Law of God?

*Next steps – Preparation: Find some way to fulfill what Psalm 1.1, 2 indicates should be our practice concerning the Law of God. Begin meditating daily on this holy and righteous and good Law.*

### 3 Outstanding

*“Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?” Deuteronomy 4.5-8*

#### *Indistinguishable?*

During a recent prayer meeting with pastors from around the country, I was struck by one pastor’s prayer, lamenting the fact that the Church in our day is largely indistinguishable from the surrounding world.

Of course, he was not referring to our having worship services on Sunday, going to Bible study groups and other church programs, and singing Christian songs. Everybody knows Christians do such things. Rather, he was bemoaning the fact that, as church members are dispersed in the world, it can be difficult to see much difference between them – how they spend their time, do their work, choose their diversions, spend their money, relate to the people around them, and so forth – and their unbelieving neighbors and co-workers. For many Christians today – perhaps most – the condition Francis Schaeffer described in a previous generation has become all too true: The spirit of the naturalism, narcissism, materialism, and sensuality of the age has crept into our thinking, and we don’t even recognize it.

Contrast this with the situation envisioned by the prophet in Micah 4.1-8. Here, people are streaming up to the mountain of the Lord’s house, eager to learn more of the Law of God that they have encountered in those who go out from the Lord’s house into the world – living and speaking in ways that demonstrate the goodness of God as embodied in His Law. In Micah’s vision, something in the lives of those who carry the Law into the neighborhoods and workplaces of the world is so outstanding, that it piques the consciences and stirs the souls of multitudes to seek it for themselves.

This is God’s agenda for “the last days,” the days in which, as Peter explained, we are presently living (Mic. 4.1; Acts 2.14-17). So why don’t we see this happening?

Is it because what my pastor friend prayed is correct? That what unbelieving people see in the Christians they know is a way of life not sufficiently outstanding to command their interest or redirect their desires?

#### *For holiness*

Christians are commanded to work at becoming holy (2 Cor. 7.1), growing in Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3.18), walking in His Spirit (Gal. 5.16-23), following His commandments (1 Jn. 2.1-6), and in every way showing themselves to be a distinctive people in the world (Eph. 5.6-21). This was God’s purpose in giving His Law to Israel, as our text explains. As they learned and obeyed the Law of God, love for God and neighbor would abound in their communities, and so outstanding would be their example of holiness and justice and mercy, that the surrounding nations would wonder at their wisdom and admire their adroitness and understanding.

And that same holy and righteous and good Law of God (Rom. 7.12) is still given to the Church to make us a people who stand out – an outstanding nation and people – because of the wisdom, understanding, love, and holiness that obeying God’s Law engenders. Greatness in the Kingdom of God can be defined as standing out as a model of righteousness, a person of peace, and a source of joy in the Spirit; and this outstanding character and demeanor comes from learning and obeying the Law of God (Matt. 5.17-19).

God is good because God is holy; God’s Law is good because it, too, is holy. As we devote ourselves to

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reading, meditating in, and walking according to the holy and righteous and good Law of God (Ps. 1), we will become holy, because Jesus, Who is the end of the Law for righteousness, will reveal Himself in love in all our words and deeds.

But as long as we regard the Law as “a dead and a useless thing,” or simply neglect it, refusing to accept it as the acorn of divine revelation that it is, we will not know the power of that Law to grow us in holiness, and we will not stand out among the people around us in ways God intends.

*Holiness is good*

Christians today have conformed to the ways of the world because they have not been renewed in their minds with the pure and holy teaching of God’s Law (Rom. 12.1, 2). We seem to be of the mindset that it’s not good form to stand out as holy – to dress, work, converse, relate to others, make and use culture, and spend our time and money as a distinct people, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a people who are possessed by and obsessed with God (1 Pet. 2.9, 10). We prefer to fit in. We don’t want others to feel uncomfortable around us, or like they have to be careful about what they say or do. And especially we don’t want them to think of us as odd or weird or some kind of goody-two-shoes.

Which is all just another way of saying that we do not believe that holiness is good, even though God is holy, and His Law is holy, and He intends to show His goodness to the world through a people who live holy lives unto Him (Ps. 81.13-16).

Holiness is good, and we know it, because God, Who is holy, is good. And since His Law is holy – a literary and legal corpus reflecting His character and will – then His Law is good for us, to help us become holy, and thus become a good people whose wisdom, compassion, justice, and righteousness will cause many to know the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

*For reflection*

1. Paul says the Law is holy (Rom. 7.12). What does he mean? Why did God give His people a *holy* Law?
2. Meditate on 2 Corinthians 7.1. Paul indicates that we must work at improving in holiness. Will this effort be aided by neglecting the Law of God? Explain.
3. How will you begin to fulfill the teaching of Psalm 1 concerning the Law of God?

*Next steps – Transformation: As you daily read and meditate in God’s Law, make some notes concerning what it teaches about being a holy person. Take steps to fulfill whatever the Law requires of you on any given day.*

## 4 The Harmony of Justice

*“You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you.”* Deuteronomy 16.18-20

### *God’s harmony on earth*

The harmony of God, which is an aspect of His goodness, consists in the effective, cooperative, and fruitful working together of the three Persons of the Trinity, each according to His unique office, and all together in a spiritual symphony of unity, order, creativity, holiness, and love. There is no discord or dissonance in the divine Godhead, only a perfect and harmonious song of love.

The Law of God encodes the harmony of God like a musical score encodes the mind of its composer. As a musical composition plays out, we delight in the many and varied harmonies combining and blending musical lines, instruments, rhythms, and motifs into one transcendent experience of goodness.

When the harmony of the Godhead plays out through the Law of God, it takes the form of justice. All the Law of God is just (“righteous,” Rom. 7.12), and it provides justice for all members of a community and all aspects of that community’s life. Justice is the harmonious good will of God coming to expression in relationships, roles, and responsibilities. A society is just when harmony exists as God intends, and the community in which justice flourishes abounds in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Lord.

No wonder justice has such a high priority in the mind of God. The harmony of justice encoded in God’s Law can be seen in the five facets of justice outlined in the Law.

### *Obligatory justice*

The first and most basic facet of justice is *obligatory* justice. In the exercise of obligatory justice, we give to others the dignity, respect, and love they deserve by virtue of their being human beings and image-bearers of God.

Paul paraphrased this aspect of a Biblical view of justice by writing that we should owe no man anything except to love him (Rom. 12.8). Biblical justice begins in our obligation to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to respect them as fellow beings made in the image of God. Obligatory justice is thus foundational to all other forms of justice.

### *Preventive justice*

The second facet of the jewel of justice in the Law of God is *preventive* justice. God instructed His people to take precautions in certain of their activities so that they did not jeopardize the property or wellbeing of their neighbors. They were expected to *prevent injustice* by thinking ahead and taking actions appropriate to ensure that neighbor love would not be interrupted or compromised.

For example, one must guard against his flocks or cattle grazing in a neighbor’s fields (Deut. 22.1-4). Open pits should be covered (Ex. 21.33, 34). Homes must be built to guard against injury to people (Deut. 22.8). Dangerous animals must be kept in (Ex. 21.35, 36). Inheritances are to be protected (Num. 27.8-11), and so forth. Even animals and the creation itself are protected by this facet of the Law from being treated unjustly by human beings (cf. Deut. 22.6, 7; 25.4).

### *Distributive justice*

How does a just society relate to those in its midst who are not flourishing, but rather, are barely able to

contribute to the wellbeing of the community because of their being poor? What does justice for the poor entail, according to the Law of God?

This facet of the Biblical teaching on justice is what we may call *distributive* justice. It is the responsibility of a local community to distribute freely of its goods to those who are in need among them (cf. Acts 4.32-37). Whether such people have become poor through some unforeseeable exigency, or whether they are immigrants or disabled, justice requires that they be provided for, according to their need, by the community in which they live.

#### *Restorative justice*

The fourth facet of the Biblical teaching on justice we may refer to as *restorative* justice. When injustice has occurred, whoever is responsible for it must be held responsible for setting things right again. In *restorative* justice, actions are taken, under the direction of proper officials, to restore the balance of justice occasioned by some failure of neighbor-love.

There is goodness in the *restorative* practice of justice. Whenever someone was injured by the neglect or indifference of a neighbor, restoration was required in order to right the balance of love in the community. Once restoration was made the injured party was satisfied and the guilty party was exonerated. Neighbors could quickly get on with being neighbors without grudges building up against one another. No prison time was involved, and no revenge was needed. Justice and harmony were restored, and that is what mattered above all.

#### *Retributive justice*

When the peace of justice is intentionally or maliciously violated, the final facet of justice – *retributive* justice – was invoked. Under the practice of retributive justice those who deliberately disturbed the peace and brought injury or damage to their neighbors, in addition to being required to restore the balance of justice, were punished in ways appropriate to the offense. The pain of punishment was directed toward the heart of the offender, not just his body or wealth, to discourage any future such acts.

The forms of justice prescribed in God's Law provide a social harmony that brings the goodness of God to light in human society. The better we understand and abide in God's Law, the more His goodness will be evident among us in the various forms of justice.

#### *For reflection*

1. How is the harmony of justice in a society like the harmony of a musical composition?
2. Can you give an example of each of the five facets of Biblical justice as they exist in our own society?
3. What are the alternatives to defining justice according to fixed and unchanging divine revelation, as in His Law? Why are these unacceptable?

*Next steps – Conversation: Should churches teach more about justice? Talk with some Christian friends. As you do, share what you have learned in this article.*

## 5 Precept upon Precept

*“Whom will he teach knowledge?  
And whom will he make to understand the message?  
Those just weaned from milk?  
Those just drawn from the breasts?  
For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept,  
Line upon line, line upon line,  
Here a little, there a little.”* Isaiah 28.9, 10

*Key to the maze*

I chuckle each time I hear [Paul Simon singing “Kodachrome.”](#) My high school days come rushing back, full of boredom and distraction, as he sings:

*When I think back  
On all the crap I learned in high school  
It’s a wonder  
I can think at all...*

I especially am vaulted back into my senior civics course, which purported to make sense of the government and laws of our nation. To me, it was all a mish-mash of cherry-picked information designed to keep unruly teenagers in line. I couldn’t make sense of it. How did all this law, and all these political offices, parties, platforms, platitudes, and regulations, fit together to make one nation under God?

I doubt even those who make the laws pay much attention to their rationale or center. Indeed, do they even read them, or do they just plunk them down on the scale of political advantage and legislate not on sound, rational, constitutional principle, but out of mere party- and self-interest? I think of Rep. Pelosi urging the passage of the Affordable Care Act by saying we need to hurry up and pass it, so that we can find out what’s in it.

I’m sure that American law has rhyme and reason. To many Americans, however it appears to be a load of, well, like Paul Simon says.

*The neglect of God’s Law*

God’s Law is not like the laws that proliferate at every level in our society. His Law issues not from self-interested political whim, but from divine unity, holiness, harmony, and order. His Law is entirely rational. Thoughtful people can reflect on the Law of God, discern its wisdom and beauty, and use the Law, under the tutelage of the Spirit, to bring the goodness of God to light in creative applications of love.

The Law of God makes sense. It builds on itself – line upon line, precept upon precept – so that it becomes a tapestry of justice, crafted to promote love for God and neighbors as normal human experience. Where ignorance of God’s Law obtains – as in many churches today – neglect of it will soon follow, and where the Law of God is ignored or neglected, lawlessness will flourish, and love will grow cold (Matt. 24.12).

This pretty much describes the situation in our country, but it has not always been so. In the early days of the American experiment, the Law of God played a formative role in shaping American jurisprudence. School children memorized and learned the Ten Commandments, taught faithfully up and down the eastern seaboard by public school teachers, preachers, and parents, and recited and enforced in courtrooms throughout the land. Such a respect for God’s Law grew up in those colonies, that when the call came to defend the liberty that Law ensured, and to be ready to lay down one’s life for God and country, multitudes

responded without hesitation.

God's Law is orderly and rational; therefore, we can learn and obey for our good, and that of our neighbors.

*Order in the Law*

A quick glance at the Ten Commandments reveals the order in God's Law.

The first four commandments guide us in loving God, the last six outline our duties in loving our neighbors. We must love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, or we will not love our neighbors as ourselves. American law today attempts to enforce a humanistic version of neighbor-love apart from love for God. How's that working out for us?

Within the first four commandments, we worship and serve God only, and no one or nothing else. He is our deliverer. He is our judge. He is the God of all grace and power. There are no other gods. So, second, we must make no images to worship other gods, or devote ourselves to anything above Him. Third, we take His Name upon us for the purpose of glorifying Him, and not vainly, or with results contrary to His character and will. Finally, we reinforce these first three commandments by honoring the Lord's Day, and using it to reflect on His power, sovereignty, grace, provision, and purpose for our lives – which makes us love Him all the more.

The order in the second table of the Law outlines the operations of a good and just society. In God's wise plan, the family is the basic institution and essential training-ground for communities that flourish in love. What God intends for people in community – respect for their persons, property, and relationships – is to be learned at home, where parents who honor the first four commandments teach their children to love God and obey His Law unto righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit. Where this occurs, where marriage is honored as God intends, and His Law is taught, learned, and obeyed, a platform and trajectory are established that can be replicated in succeeding generations, unto a good and just society (Ps. 78.5-7).

That this so seldom happens in our day is no reflection on God's Law, but on the power of the law of sin to distract us from God and His Word, and to lead us to embrace merely selfish interests. In the Church, therefore, we help neither our families, our children, nor our communities by neglecting to teach the holy and righteous and good Law of the Lord.

The various statutes, precepts, rules, testimonies, and commandments that make up the civil law can all be arranged in an orderly manner beneath their respective Commandments, so that we can read, study, and make sense of the Law, and obey its holy and righteous and good teaching for goodness' sake.

*For reflection*

1. Why does it matter that the Law of God is orderly, rational, and makes sense?
2. Can you see how each of the Ten Commandments leads logically to the next? Explain.
3. Since God's Law is orderly and rational; and since we can know and obey it; and since knowing and obeying God's Law enables love to flourish; does it make sense to neglect such a precious resource?

*Next steps – Conversation: Is the Law of God taught in your church or the churches of your Christian friends? Ask a few. What could you do together to begin reading, meditating on, and living within the order and rationality of God's Law?*

## 6 Palette of Freedom

*So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.* James 2.12

### *Liberty?*

Many Christians today regard the Law of God as unnecessary. Worse, they see it as a yoke or burden, weighing them down and keeping them from what they perceive to be the freedom and spontaneity of the Spirit. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is,” they insist, “there is liberty!” (2 Cor. 3.17). Keeping the Law, they say, claps us in rigid irons of legalism, whereas walking in the Spirit liberates us into the true freedom of Jesus.

This, of course, is precisely wrong.

Consider Paul’s explanation of what it means to know the liberating power of the Spirit: “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8.5-7). That is, to be *spiritually* minded, where we know true life and peace, live in the freedom of the Spirit, and enjoy all the goodness of God in the true *liberty* of the Spirit, is to be subject to the Law of God – the law of liberty, as James has it.

Thus to be *free* from the Law is actually to be imprisoned to self, whim, the spirit of the age, smooth-talking spiritual powers of wickedness, clever but misguided theologians, or whatever – anything and everything *except* the life-giving, fruit-bearing, gift-bestowing, witness-empowering, into-the-image-of-Jesus-transforming Spirit of God.

The Spirit of God is the muse who inspires creative applications of the life-giving Law to everyday situations. By the Spirit of God we live not according to the *letter* of the Law, but in the *Spirit* of it, from the heart, unto the creativity that issues from the divine image and Word, making all things new (2 Cor. 3.1-6). We are artists, and into our hands God has placed His Law, this palette of freedom, so that we might paint beautiful pictures of holiness, righteousness, and goodness on the canvas of our lives and times.

### *Imitate Paul*

In 1 Corinthians 11.1, the apostle Paul exhorted his readers to imitate him, just as he imitated Christ. I assume he intended that for us as well, who are his readers today.

Paul was steeped in the Law of God, and quick to apply it. When, under interrogation by the Jewish court, he was struck in the face at the high priest’s command, he exploded in a rage at this gross violation of the Law of God: “Then Paul said to him, ‘God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?’” When it was explained to him that he was addressing the high priest, he regained his composure, and submitted to the Law: “Then Paul said, ‘I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, “*You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people*”’” (Acts 23.3-5).

Paul argued that keeping the Law would save no one; however, this did not nullify the Law, making it a “dead and a useless thing” for those who believe in Jesus. No; Paul insisted that being justified by grace through faith in Jesus, the Law of God is *established* for us, so that by it we might both know our sin and follow the leading of the Spirit into the righteousness of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3.31; 7.12; 8.5-7; 10.3, 4).

We are not imitating Paul, and we are not imitating Jesus, if we do not submit to the Law of God in the freedom of the Spirit.

*The master at his palette*

But if we do, Paul shows us what glorious creativity the Law can engender to bring out the goodness of God in the land of the living. In two instances, Paul, following the leading of the Spirit, made creative applications of the Law of God to restore justice and bring God's goodness into the churches in Corinth.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul denounced the Corinthians' blinking at sin in their midst, and applied Old Testament civil statutes to expose their sin and insist that the congregation "vomit out" from their midst the one who had transgressed the Law of God (cf. Lev. 18.6-29). Later, acknowledging the remorse and repentance of the excommunicated brother, Paul urged the Corinthians to receive him back into full communion (2 Cor. 2.3-11).

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul used the Law to expose the sinful way the Corinthians had taken advantage of him as he ministered among them. He appealed to two Old Testament laws, one which would not have appeared to be relevant to the situation, and one from the ceremonial or religious laws, which had been superseded by Christ our High Priest, but contain valid principles to guide us. Paul was forced to work a day job during those 18 months in Corinth, because it never occurred to the Corinthians that they should support him as he carried on his ministry among them. He cited Deuteronomy 25.4, about not muzzling the ox as he treads out the grain, to insist that he who had sown spiritual things among the Corinthians should have been cared for in his material needs by them (1 Cor. 9.1-12). To add an exclamation point to his claim, he cited the Old Testament laws concerning material provisions for the priests as applicable to himself, as a priest and minister of God (Lev. 6:16, 26; 7:6, 31). "Even so," Paul made the application, "the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel" (1 Cor. 9.13, 14).

Paul could make such creative and life-giving applications of the Law because he had submitted to it in the Spirit, studying and listening for the Spirit to teach him the proper applications of God's Law for good into the circumstances of his daily life and ministry.

This is what God expects of us as well; but we will not be able to paint well from this palette of freedom as long as we remain unskilled in its resources and techniques. The Spirit does indeed set us free in the freedom of our Lord Jesus Christ, but He does so through the goodness of God's Law.

*For reflection*

1. In what ways does the Law of God help us to know the freedom we have in Jesus?
2. How is the Law of God like a palette? How are we like artists who must use that palette?
3. Can we imitate Paul and Jesus without learning and obeying the Law of God? Explain.

*Next steps – Conversation: Talk with a fellow Christian about what you are learning in this series, and from your reading of the Law of God.*

## 7 Law and Love

*Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.* Romans 13.10

*“And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”* Matthew 24.12

### *A community of hate?*

The Church in America today has achieved the dubious and deplorable status in the eyes of many of our neighbors as being a community characterized above all by hate.

Our vocal opponents insist that we hate gays, evolutionists, and abortionists. We hate the poor, Blacks, Muslims, drug addicts, and illegal immigrants – all immigrants, for that matter. We are intolerant of people who do not agree with us, and we even hate some of those who claim to agree with us. As the angry world sees us, we are so consumed with our own agenda, our own interests, and our own freedoms that we hate anyone who opposes or disagrees with us.

And is there not a measure of truth in these accusations?

Certainly, the charge that Christians are a people of hate is exaggerated. But it would not be made at all, and it certainly would not receive the kind of widespread acceptance it has, unless there were a measure of truth in it. To the extent that we *are* a people of hate, we do harm to our neighbors, even if only by neglect. We pay very little attention to their interests and needs; we do not take the time to get to know them, or to care about their concerns; and we insist that they leave us alone so that we can do our thing in the Name of the Lord.

But if we do not love our neighbors like Jesus did, we do hate them, and do them harm, and so deserve the accusations that are laid against us by our adversaries.

### *Neglect of the Law*

To the extent there is any truth to this claim, a primary reason is our scandalous neglect of the Law of God. The intent of the Law is good, not evil, and the method of that goodness is love. The fullness of the Law, and its fulfillment in whole and part, is love, working good into the lives of our neighbors, our communities, our cultures, and our world. But where that Law is neglected, lawlessness will take its place. This is the case, to some degree, in the churches of our land. And wherever it is the case, love will grow cold, and the charges of being a people who hate rather than love will increasingly stick.

The goal of all Christian instruction and discipleship is love (1 Tim. 1.5; Jn. 13.3). Love is the fulfillment of all the Law and the prophets (Matt. 22.34-40); and living and teaching the Law, and the love for God and neighbors it encodes, is the mark of greatness in the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5.17-19). If we neglect the Law of God, we encourage the spread of evil (Prov. 28.4), and God will not hear our prayers (Prov. 28.9), leaving us to our own wits, wiles, and strength to live a version of the Christian life that God neither recognizes nor endorses.

And this neglect looks for all the world like a lifestyle of self-love and self-righteousness and hate.

Reject, ignore, neglect, fail to love and delight in and obey the Law of God, and you will have neither the resources needed for loving your neighbor as yourself, nor the blessing of God in whatever you undertake in His Name.

### *Getting on track*

The antidote to ignorance is learning, and the antidote to neglect is attention. The antidote to hate is love, and

### *The Law is Good*

when love is seen in action, in all the everyday relationships, roles, and responsibilities of our lives, those who accuse us of being a people of hate will be silenced by the example of our loving lives (1 Pet. 2.11-17).

We must recover the Law of God, recognizing that it is the core curriculum of the Holy Spirit in leading us into Christlikeness (Ezek. 36.26, 27; 2 Cor. 3.12-18). Meditate daily on the Ten Commandments, with a view to understanding and obeying them fully – not to *earn* your salvation, but to *work it out in full and abundant life in Christ* (Phil. 2.12, 13; Lev. 18.1-5; Matt. 5.17-19). Spend some time each day reading through the statutes, precepts, testimonies, rules, and commandments of the civil law of ancient Israel, and meditate on how you, following Paul and Jesus, should walk the path they mark out (1 Jn. 2.1-6; Ps. 119.59, 60). Study the Law diligently, using whatever resources you can find to help you understand its teaching and how to apply it today. The end of the Law is righteousness in Jesus Christ, that we might be made more like Him, and those who would be righteous will meditate daily on God's Law, until they delight in and love it, and it begins to bear real, visible, loving fruit in their lives (Ps. 1).

Are you tired of being labeled a community of hate? Learn to love, and you'll silence that argument forthwith. But your love will grow cold if you neglect the Law of God, and you will only do harm to your neighbor if you think you know better than God how you ought to relate to him. Learning and obeying the Law of God is the key to loving God and our neighbors with the love of Jesus Christ. The sooner we get back to the Law, reading and meditating and teaching and obeying it as the Scriptures command, the more we will grow in love, and the more the goodness of God will abound in the land of the living.

#### *For reflection*

1. Have you been guilty of neglecting the Law of God? How can you begin to redress this situation, or to improve obedience to God's Law?
2. We are not saved by keeping God's Law. But we are not saved without keeping it. Explain.
3. How can you help your Christian friends to appreciate the holiness, righteousness, and goodness of God's Law (Rom. 7.12)?

*Next steps – Transformation: Add to your daily disciplines some reading and meditation in God's Law. Pray about how to obey the Law. Share with a Christian friend your plan, and ask your friend to pray for you concerning this matter.*

*The Law is Good*

*Questions for Reflection or Discussion*

1. The Law is good. Should we expect to learn about the goodness of God from His Law? Can we afford to neglect the Law? Explain.
2. Can we truly love God and our neighbors apart from the Law of God? Why not?
3. Why is the Law of God neglected in so many churches today?
4. How can you make sure the Law of God works to bring forth His goodness in your life?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.