

THE LAW OF GOD

MISCELLANIES 1



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Law of God Miscellanies 1
Copyright 2018 T. M. and Susie Moore
The Fellowship of Ailbe
www.ailbe.org

Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. All psalms for singing adapted from The Ailbe Psalter. All quotations from Church Fathers from Ancient Christian Commentary Series, General Editor Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press).

The Law of God Miscellanies 1: Introduction

Welcome to Part 1 of our 3-part series on the Law of God.

In this series we will sample excerpts from God's Law in an effort to show the scope, beauty, and relevance of the Law of God for Christian life.

We must not neglect God's Law. The Spirit of God uses the Law to unlock all the rest of Scripture, point us to Jesus, and guide us along the path of full and abundant life. In this series we hope you will find much encouragement and guidance in making daily reading and meditation in God's Law part of your spiritual disciplines.

We're pleased to make this resource available for personal or group study at no charge, and we hope you will find this series helpful in realizing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God.

Please visit our website, www.ailbe.org, to discover the many other resources available to serve your needs. The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Visit our website also to subscribe to our thrice-weekly devotional newsletter, *Crosfigell*, or our daily *Voices Together* devotional and prayer guide.

If you find these studies, or any of our other resources, helpful, we hope you will consider making a contribution to help support our work. You can do so by using the donate button at the website or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

1 On the Harshness of God's Law

"Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" Deuteronomy 5.29

"Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death. Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, animal for animal. If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him—fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him." Leviticus 24.17-20

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them." Ezekiel 36.26, 27

Reflect and discuss.

1. How much do you know about the historical and cultural conditions in which the Law was given? How familiar are you with the nations that surrounded Israel in those days? What were they like? By what kind of laws were they governed?

2. What does the condition of Israel's heart in the Old Testament have to do with the apparent harshness of the Law of God?

Think about it.

Certain provisions commanded in God's Law seem harsh and inhumane to the modern mind.

But the modern mind is the beneficiary of two millennia of social development, much of which is the result (1) of principles based on God's Law which have become embedded in the social order, and (2) the workings of grace and the Spirit of God through His ever-advancing Kingdom. The Law of God, in its original form, was given at a time when no such legal precedent or spiritual power existed.

The pagan peoples of Canaan were passionate and violent, with no or few written laws and a social order that was maintained by, among other things, continuous war, pillage, and idolatry involving fornication and human sacrifice.

The people of Israel, at the time the Law was given, had no experience with freedom. They lacked the inward restraint of the Spirit of God, and they did not have it in their hearts to fear the Lord. Throughout their history, the people of Israel were prone to self-seeking of the vilest sort, and they were often swayed in their actions by the pagan peoples around them.

The Law *was* harsh in places, Jesus explained, because of the hardness of people's hearts and the slippery slope of sin (Matt. 19.1-12; Mk. 10.1-12).

The Law served the people of Israel in a way similar to how martial law preserves social order during times when that order has been broken or violated or is in jeopardy. The harshness of the Law was only temporary; it pointed forward to the time when a greater order would be realized and the goodness inherent in the Law would flourish. It looked forward to the time when a Prophet from God would speak His Word with greater clarity and force than in the Law, and when His Spirit would dwell within His people to enable them to live according to His good and upright plan. Thereafter, God's people would be able to understand the Law beyond the mere letter of the Law into the spirit of it, and to discern those best practices which issue in justice, defined as love for God and neighbor.

Meditate and discuss.

1. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul dealt with a situation which, under the Law of Israel, would have required the death penalty (cf. Deut. 22.30; 27.20; Lev. 20.11). But Paul insisted only that the church in Corinth remove the offender from their midst. Why? What had changed from the days of Moses to the days of Paul? How was Paul's teaching in line with the *spirit* of the Law and not just the *letter* (2 Cor. 3.4-6)? What ultimately became of that man who was excommunicated (2 Cor. 2.3-9)? Did Paul and the Corinthians keep the Law? Explain.

2. Look at Matthew 5.17-19 and Romans 3.21-31. How would you describe Jesus' relationship to the Law and the Law's role in the life of a believer?

3. In our day, we may not need the Law in all its "martial law" aspects, but we need the Law nonetheless. What is the relationship between the indwelling Spirit of Christ and the Law of God?

"Whoever does not believe in Christ, of whom Moses wrote in the law, destroys the law. But whoever believes in Christ, of whom Moses wrote, confirms the law through faith, because he believes in Christ." Origen of Alexandria (185-254 AD)

Thank You, Lord, for Your holy and righteous and good Law (Rom. 7.12). Help me to...

Pray Psalm 19.7-11.

As you pray, put in your own words the various benefits of the Law mentioned in these verses.

Psalm 19.7-14 (*St. Christopher: Beneath the Cross of Jesus*)

The Law of God is perfect, His testimony sure;
The simple man God's wisdom learns, the soul receives its cure.
God's Word is right, and His command is pure, and truth imparts;
He makes our eyes to understand; with joy He fills our hearts.

The fear of God is cleansing, forever shall it last.
His judgments all are true and just, by righteousness held fast.
O seek them more than gold most fine, than honey find them sweet;
Be warned by every word and line; be blessed with joy complete.

Who, Lord, can know his errors? O keep sin far from me!
Let evil rule not in my soul that I may blameless be.
O let my thoughts, let all my words, before Your glorious sight
Be pleasing to You, gracious Lord, acceptable and right!

2 Law as Restraint

He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so." Matthew 19.8

What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Galatians 3.19

Reflect and discuss.

1. Israel did not have a heart to obey God's Law, yet He gave them His Law anyway. What do you suppose life in Israel would have been like without the Law of God?
2. We might think that the Law was not needed in the beginning, before Adam and Eve fell into sin. But is that really true? Did God give any Law to Adam and Eve? Do even *perfect and sinless* people need guidance from the Lord? Explain.

Think about it.

We cannot afford to ignore the Law of God. The Law was given because the hearts of God's people were hardened against Him, like the hearts of all people. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, sin became a permanent fixture of the human condition (Rom. 5.12). And one of the tendencies of sin is to rebel against God and exalt oneself as god in His place (cf. Rom. 1.18-32).

This can be seen easily enough when we recall how quickly the people of Israel turned to idols following their deliverance from Egypt. Though they had seen the greatness and glory of God, and had received the benefits of His saving grace, even then they built a calf and cavorted before it.

The Law marks out the path of righteousness. It serves as guardrails, showing where not to go, and as pavement, marking the path of safety and life. But the Law is not righteousness, and keeping the Law does not make us righteous. Only God, especially as we may know Him in Jesus, is righteousness, as Jesus' subsequent conversation with the young rich man shows us (Matt. 19.16-22). And only the Spirit and Word of God can bring us into the righteousness of Jesus (Jn. 6.63; 2 Cor. 3.12-18). The Law restrains our sinful impulses and inclinations, as we follow Jesus and obey Him, trusting in Him like little children (Matt. 19.13-15). Jesus is the last word on righteousness and the Law, and the apostles are the final judges with Him of how we must obey the Law as we follow Him (Matt. 19.27-29).

Jesus is the true Tree of Life, while all the things of this world – riches, families, lands, and more – represent the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They are ours to know in abundance (v. 29), but only once we have eaten from the Tree of Life – only after we have come to faith in Jesus. Otherwise, things can become idols, which, like our first parents and the forbidden fruit, we choose to indulge, rather than to obey the Lord, thus unleashing all our most vile, covetous, and self-serving ways.

The Law illuminates and condemns our sinful tendencies and practices, but even more, it points the way to true righteousness and life in Jesus. We need the Law of God because the law of sin still operates within us (Rom. 7.13-23). Ignore the Law, and you make yourself willfully ignorant of – and certain to be overcome by – the power of sin.

Meditate and discuss.

1. James warned his readers not to indulge the sinful tendencies lingering within their souls (Jms. 5.1-12; cf. Jms. 4.7-10). Here is a look at how to make good use of the Law as a restraint of sin. What particular sins did

James address in these verses? To which of the Ten Commandments do these relate?

2. Meditate on Leviticus 19.13 and 19.17, 18. Does it seem to you James had these in mind as he wrote his letter? Look also at verse 12, and consider this verse in its original context (Matt. 5.33-37). How does James' reference to Jesus teach us to think about the Law?

3. The Law not only shows us our sin; it also warns us that God will act against our sins to get us back on the path of righteousness. James certainly implied this in his exhortation in these verses. How did the writer of Hebrews explain this (Heb. 12.3-11)? How can we avoid such "miserics" and "chastening"?

"Think how great is the wickedness of those who not only refuse to share their wealth with the poor and needy but who go one step further and refuse to pay their workers the wages which are due to them!" The Venerable Bede (672-735 AD)

Lord, You mean for Your Law to guide my steps in the path of righteousness. I want to walk that path, Lord, therefore...

Pray Psalm 1.1-6.

Consider this description of the righteous person. To what extent does this describe you? Seek the Lord to guide you more fully into the way of righteousness.

Psalm 1.1-6 (*St. Thomas: I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord*)

How blessed are they that shun sin's vain and wicked ways.
For them has Christ salvation won; He loves them all their days.

God's Word is their delight; they prosper in its truth.
In it they dwell both day and night to flourish and bear fruit.

Firm planted on the banks of God's great stream of grace,
They raise unending praise and thanks to His great glorious face.

The wicked are not so, but, driven by the winds,
They fall and perish, weighed with woe, when once God's wrath begins.

In Jesus' righteousness, though sinners fail and fall,
His flock He will preserve and bless, who on His favor call.

3 Works and the Law

“You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.” Leviticus 18.4, 5

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

Reflect and discuss.

1. Christians have been redeemed and saved for good works (Eph. 2.8-10). Which good works? How can we know which works are truly good?
2. How would you explain the relationship between the Law of God and love?

Think about it.

That the Law of God prescribes specific works which are pleasing to God is beyond doubt. He would not command them if they were not according to His pleasure and will (1 Jn. 3.22).

Taken together the works of the Law outline the path of holiness, righteousness (justice), and goodness (Rom. 7.12), thus describing the kind of people God calls us to be, the type of works we should do, and the effect these works can have on ourselves and our neighbors.

The works of God’s Law direct us in the ways of love for God and neighbors. We increase in holiness by engaging God in His glory, revealed to us in His Law (and in all His Word, 2 Cor. 3.12-18). Increasing in holiness makes us want to do the works of the Law so that justice and love come forth in all we do, as justice and love were in Jesus (1 Jn. 2.1-6; 3.7).

The result of walking the path of God’s Law is that grace flows through us, by the power of the Spirit (Jn. 7.37-39), so that we realize the promised blessings of our salvation. Thus, the good works which the Law commands must not be understood as *unto* salvation, as though doing them would save us. Rather, they are intended *for the sake* of salvation, so that we might know more of the good blessings of God which are contained in our salvation and realized as we work out – not *for* – our salvation in obedience to God’s Word and in the power of His Spirit (Phil. 2.12, 13).

True faith, therefore, does not despise the Law, whether by denial or neglect. True faith delights in the Law, for it shows the way of salvation, the way to the benefits and blessings of the salvation we have received as a free gift of God’s grace.

Meditate and discuss.

1. Since the Law is *good*, and Christians are called to do *good* works, shouldn’t we devote ourselves more to reading, studying, and practicing the works of God’s Law? How does Psalm 1 counsel us in this regard?
2. Some might say that we don’t need the Law, we only need to follow the Spirit of God to do the good works He commands. How does Paul answer that claim in Romans 8.5-9?
3. James says we should keep in mind that a day is coming when God will judge our works according to His Law (Jms. 2.8-13). How does he counsel us to prepare for that day?

“To fail in one point is to lack perfect love, for this is the source of all good deeds. If something in the head is not right, the rest of the body suffers as a result. The entire purpose and plan of God is designed to lead to perfect love. That is the meaning of the

The Law of God Miscellanies 1

commandments such as 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not kill' and so on." Andreas (7th century).

Teach me Your Law, O Lord, all those good works ordained from of old, and help me to...

Pray Psalm 40.1-8.

Thank the Lord for His many blessings, and seek His help so that you begin increasingly to delight in His Law and hide it securely in your heart.

Psalm 40.1-8 (*Dix: For the Beauty of the Earth*)

I waited patiently for God; He inclined and heard my cry,
Lifted me up above the sod, set me on a Rock on high!
New songs in my mouth He gave; may He through me many save.

Blessed are all who trust in You, turning both from lies and pride.
Countless wonders, Lord, You do, and Your thoughts with us abide.
Lord, Your worth who can declare? None with You can e'er compare.

Offerings You do not require – open now my ears, O Lord.
What from me do You desire? Firm delight to do Your Word.
Take my life in ev'ry part; write Your Law upon my heart.

4 A Devotional Life

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.” Exodus 20.2, 3

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. Romans 12.1

Reflect and discuss.

1. Many “gods” other than the one true God seek for our devotion. Explain.
2. What’s “reasonable” about living as a sacrifice to God? Why does that make sense? Why is it the best life we might choose?

Think about it.

God’s purpose in giving His Law was to create a people for Himself who will reflect His holiness, restore His creation, and resound His praises throughout the earth. As the first question of our *Kingdom Catechism* puts it:

Q 1: What is the Law of God?

A 1: The Law of God is God’s program, which Jesus fulfilled, for bringing into being a people holy and blameless before Him in love. (Eph. 1.3, 4; Rom. 7.12; Matt. 5.17-19)

The realization of this program depends on people being exclusively devoted to Him. If our focus, as His redeemed people, is in any way diverted from the Lord, that is, if we desire anything above Him or depend on anything apart from Him, or if we seek joy and meaning and fullness of pleasure anywhere other than in Him, then we shall not be able to realize the purpose of our redemption, and we will fall short of God’s design for us.

Holiness begins in and is sustained by devotion. Devotion is driven by the vision and knowledge of God and consists of a particular use of our time and a particular investment of our souls and bodies in seeking the face of the Lord and His glory.

Devotion thus requires meditation, prayer, waiting on and listening for the Spirit, singing in our hearts and with our voices, envisioning the Lord, and responding to Him. The Christian should take as a goal developing and maintaining, not just an effective *time* of devotion, but a *lifestyle* of devotion, so that, increasingly, all our waking moments and conscious activities are engaged and pursued in the presence of and for the good pleasure of God.

By nurturing the fear of God and practicing His presence, we learn to obey, serve, and love Him at all times (2 Cor. 7.1; Deut. 10.12-22). Thus, the image of God, in which we have been created and unto which we are being transformed daily (2 Cor. 3.12-18), is more fully formed in us, and we realize more of the purpose of our having been created and redeemed, and the abundance of life as God intends it.

Holiness and blessedness – fullness of life in Jesus Christ (Jn. 10.10) – are realized in a devotional life.

Meditate and discuss.

1. Is it really possible to have a “devotional life” – a life that is continuously focused on, devoted to, and committed to the Lord? What would you say are the keys to such a life?

2. Other “gods” promise to make us happy, satisfy our needs, fulfill our desires, and give meaning to our lives. Why can they never completely deliver on their promises? How can we keep these things from being *gods* and use them instead as expressions of a devotional life?

3. The first commandment reminds us that a devotional life depends on and is grounded in our having received the grace of God for salvation. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 6.19, 20. What does it mean to “glorify God in your body”? How does this relate to living a devotional life?

“In the first commandment of the Decalogue, just as the worship and service of the one Lord God is most clearly commanded, so for adoration and service to be shown by the faithful to any creature is most vehemently forbidden.” Fulgentius (467-532 AD)

Show me how to live as a sacrifice to You Lord, so that I...

Pray Psalm 100.

Why should we serve the Lord, according to this Psalm? How should we serve Him? As you pray, thank the Lord for all the reasons He gives you to be glad.

Psalm 100.1-5 (*Truro: Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*)

Shout to the Lord with joy, O earth! With gladness serve His matchless worth!
Before Him sing with joyful words, and know that God alone is Lord!

He made us all, and not our hands – His people, we before Him stand.
A faithful Shepherd, He will keep and care for us as His own sheep.

Enter His gates with thanks and praise; extol His Name through all your days!
Give thanks to Him, and bless His Name! His praise forevermore proclaim!

Good is the Lord, so good and kind; His love we evermore may find.
His faithfulness is ever sure; to every age it shall endure!

5 Valid Prophets

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, 16 according to all you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’ And the LORD said to me: ‘What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.” Deuteronomy 18.15-20

Reflect and discuss.

1. What is a *prophet*? What do the prophets of the Old Testament have in common? What does Jesus – *the Prophet* – have in common with the Old Testament prophets?
2. How was Jesus as the Prophet like Moses in His work of prophesying? What makes someone a *false prophet*?

Think about it.

In the larger picture of redemption, Jesus, the great Prophet, is foretold here. He not only *has* the Word of God, He *is* the Word of God. Whoever will not listen to Him will die in his sins, just as Jesus said (Jn. 8.24).

But Jesus was the culmination of a *line* and *tradition* of prophets, all of whom could be recognized, the Lord explained, by their being like Moses in their work. What does this mean?

First, the true prophets are called of God. Like Moses, they recognize that theirs is a terrible calling, that they are insufficient for it apart from the Lord’s continuous help, and that they can only fulfill their calling by maintaining a continuous presence and communion with the Lord.

Second, prophets are invested with a special message for God’s people, a message of covenant promise and renewal that focuses on the great and precious promises of God, especially as these are realized in the great Prophet, our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 1.4). Like Moses, every prophet is charged with proclaiming all that the Lord speaks to him.

Finally, all true prophets are authorized and expect to speak in ways consistent with the Law of God. The teaching of the prophets, including our Lord Jesus and the apostles, did not diverge from the Law. Instead, all true prophetic preaching and teaching is validated by the consistency it demonstrates with the Law and covenant of God.

Preachers and teachers today have received the mantle of Moses, the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles. They must make sure that they are like Moses in all respects, and that their preaching and teaching encompass all the counsel of God in Scripture, including His Law. That prophet who will not preach or teach the Law has become a law unto himself, depriving God’s people of all His inspired Word and deciding on his own authority what they shall hear.

God has not commanded such neglect of His Law. Quite the opposite, in fact. Those prophets who neglect it are therefore not speaking in the Name of the Lord, and are not valid prophets at all.

Meditate and discuss.

1. Meditate on Acts 20.25-28 and Luke 24.25-27. How should these passages encourage those who are entrusted with preaching and teaching God’s Word?

2. Meditate on 2 Timothy 3.15-17. How much of Scripture is *profitable*? For what is it profitable? If we neglect the Law of God in our preaching, teaching, and reading of Scripture, can we expect to profit as the Lord intends? Explain.

3. We see how God pointed through Moses to Jesus in our text for today. How many other ways does the Law of God point to Jesus? Is it profitable for us to consider these? Explain.

“We can be prepared to find some prophet even of impiety—and perhaps not just one but several—who will tell us of a word of the Lord, which the Lord has not at all commanded, or a ‘word of wisdom’ which has nothing whatever to do with wisdom.”
Origen of Alexandria (185-254 AD)

Grant, Lord, that I may always submit to Your Word, and keep me from...

Pray Psalm 19.7-14.

As you pray, give thanks to God for the various ways His Word has profited you.

Psalm 19.7-14 (*St. Christopher: Beneath the Cross of Jesus*)

The Law of God is perfect, His testimony sure;
The simple man God’s wisdom learns, the soul receives its cure.
God’s Word is right, and His command is pure, and truth imparts;
He makes our eyes to understand; with joy He fills our hearts.

The fear of God is cleansing, forever shall it last.
His judgments all are true and just, by righteousness held fast.
O seek them more than gold most fine, than honey find them sweet;
Be warned by every word and line; be blessed with joy complete.

Who, Lord, can know his errors? O keep sin far from me!
Let evil rule not in my soul that I may blameless be.
O let my thoughts, let all my words, before Your glorious sight
Be pleasing to You, gracious Lord, acceptable and right!

6 Lex Rex

“Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.” Deuteronomy 17.18-20

Reflect and discuss.

1. Societies prefer order to chaos, but why should this be? Is there something in the human psyche that longs for order rather than chaos?
2. Should the order a society desires be vested in an individual – such as a king or dictator – or in a body of law? Explain.

Think about it.

This passage brings together two disparate ideas into one new vision for human life in society.

The first idea is that of civil order. This notion derives from humankind’s having been made in the image and likeness of God. We are creatures who require order and governance if we are to live together for mutual benefit. God has written the works of His Law on the heart of every human being (Rom. 2.14, 15). For many people, that Law has been ignored, forgotten, or seriously compromised; but it can never be effaced. For those who know the Lord, the Spirit of God renews their hearts and “rewrites” the Law there, that it may be read, studied, and learned (Ezek. 36.26, 27).

Human societies reflect, some much more than others, the wisdom and mutual love which exist among the Persons in the Godhead. Even pagan nations know they must have some form of order if they are to survive. The nations surrounding ancient Israel had provided kings for themselves before Israel arrived in Canaan. This was not an institution familiar to the people of God. But, as God shows us here, a monarchy can be an acceptable way of organizing a people for a just and fruitful civil order. Even pagan nations know this intuitively.

The second idea here is completely new, and by it God prescribes a form of civil order that will ensure blessedness for those who abide within it. The wisdom embodied in such a civil order actually appeals to the image of God in people, whether or not they know the Lord (cf. Deut. 4.6-8; Mic. 4.1-8; Ps. 81.15).

Israel’s king, and the civil order over which he presided, were to be framed and ordered by the Law of God. Both rulers and the people, and all aspects of the social order, were to be ordered by the teaching of the Law of God. It was the duty of prophets and priests to monitor and comment on this order, and to insist on reform whenever needed (cf. Deut. 18.15). We may refer to this arrangement by the term *Lex Rex*: the Law – holy, righteous, good, and unchanging – is king.

By hewing to the order indicated in the Law of God, the nation of Israel would bear witness to the world of the wisdom, majesty, grace, justice, and truth of God. Nations far and near would come to learn from such an order how they may know similar wisdom and benefits for themselves (cf. 1 Kgs. 10).

It is surprising to see how many of the first written laws in America were based on, if not quoted verbatim from, the Law of God. The Law of God provides a framework for justice, good works, and neighbor love that every human being knows intuitively to be wise, but that only they who love God and His Law are

willing to embrace. The Law of God is holy and righteous and good (Rom. 7.12). It does not change, but it must be applied in ways appropriate to every generation and every situation, so that the abiding principles of the Law find proper application in a wide range of societies and cultures.

Neglect of or indifference to the Law of God invites what is referred to as *progressive law*, law that changes with the whims of people, whether kings, parliaments, or legislatures. This arrangement can be referred to as *Rex Lex*: the king is the law. Such law is easily manipulated to serve the interests of those who make the law.

Safety, security, and order obtain where the Law of God is king. Uncertainty and oppression loom in any situation where the rulers make whatever laws serve their purposes.

Meditate and discuss.

1. Why was it important that the king of Israel should write out his own copy of the Law of God? Which of the two approaches to social order – *Lex Rex* or *Rex Lex* – does this illustrate? Explain.
2. It was expected of the king that he would read from the Law every day and observe it in all his ways. What effects would this have on him and on the nation (Deut. 17.19, 20)? Meditate on Psalm 1. Who is the righteous person?
3. Should laws and civil order today be informed and shaped by the Law of God? Explain.

“You are a wayfarer, like to him who prayed, ‘Direct my steps.’ ‘Give heed to yourself that you may swerve not from the path, that you decline neither to the right nor the left. Keep to the king’s highway.” Basil the Great (330-379 AD)

I pray for our country, Lord, and for those who rule over our civic order, that they might...I pray for our country, Lord, and for those who rule over our civic order, that they might...

Pray Psalm 148.7-12.

God calls rulers and peoples of all nations to worship Him. How should you pray for this to come to pass?

Psalm 148.7-12 (*Hendon: Take My Life and Let It Be*)

Let all creatures, everything, God’s great praises loudly sing!
His Name only brims with worth, far above both heav’n and earth,
Far above both heav’n and earth!

Mountains, hills, and all you trees, livestock, birds, and every beast,
Cedars, every creeping thing, His majestic glory sing,
His majestic glory sing!

Kings of earth and peoples all, young men, maidens, on Him call!
Old men, children, princes, kings, bring to God your offerings,
Bring to God your offerings.

7 The Essence of Idolatry

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” Exodus 20.4-6

Reflect and discuss.

1. What is an idol? Why do people look to idols? What does an idol represent?
2. Is it possible to have an idol in your life and not even know it? Explain.

Think about it.

Every worldview focuses on unseen things, hoped-for realities which do not presently exist, at least, not to the extent they are desired, and for the securing of which one invests all his interest and bends all his exertions. Every human being lives for unseen realities – things or circumstances not yet possessed but earnestly desired and daily pursued.

For Christians, those realities are spiritual – God and Christ, the Spirit and salvation, the City to Come, the promises of God.

For nonbelievers, while the things they hope for are not *yet* seen, they may already possess some of what they hope for above all else – wealth, leisure, material possessions, fame – but they envision themselves possessing even more, and they hope that will one day be the case.

A person’s vision is a likeness of some hoped-for condition or possession which resonates with the entirety of that person’s mind, heart, and conscience. To the extent that such vision – such a likeness – is populated with created things, it amounts to a pantheon of idols.

For whatever a person envisions, commands the imagination and is what that person will desire; and what people desire is what they love. What people love they submit to and obey, that they might thereby possess the thing they desire. This desire to possess the hoped-for thing or condition thus possesses them and determines the course they will take in life. People thus make themselves servants of a likeness of their own creation, rather than God, Who reveals Himself in His Word. Such people are practicing idolatry.

This is why it is so important that we discipline ourselves to know the Lord, to fear and love Him, prefer His Word and ways, and yield ourselves and all our possessions and circumstances to Him. The likeness that rules our lives must be the pure gold of the exalted Christ and His Kingdom and salvation. He must be our vision, filling our minds with wonder and curiosity, our hearts with delight and joy, and our consciences with a firm resolution to seek Him exclusively and all the more.

With Christ as our vision, rather than created things or optimal circumstances, we may expect to realize full and abundant life, as He promised (Jn. 10.10; 14.6).

But the Lord will surely frustrate our hope for peace, fulfillment, joy, and security if we place it anywhere but in Him. He will certainly discipline those who believe in Him until we destroy every image and likeness but His own as the commanding vision of our lives (Heb. 12.1-11).

They who pursue idols become like the vision they desire and love. Love God. Desire Jesus. Rest all your vision and hope in Him, and He will give you full and abundant, eternal life.

Meditate and discuss.

1. Read Romans 1.18-32. Why do people not recognize God as He reveals Himself to them? Why do they prefer idols, of their own construction, to God?
2. Is it possible for Christians to be idolaters? Explain. How would you know if that was beginning to be the case with you?
3. What can we do to make sure that Jesus Christ and His Kingdom and salvation are the commanding vision of our lives?

*“You should realize that you are walking on the edge of a sharp sword, that you are standing on the edge of a precipice with a ravine on either side. Do not let your thoughts be upset by things here on earth, but keep your mind’s gaze on Jerusalem which is above.”
Babai (early 6th century AD)*

Lord, let there be no idols in my life. Instead, help me to...

Pray Psalm 115.1-8

Let the Spirit reveal any idols lurking or emerging in your soul.

Psalm 115.1-8 (*Plainfield: Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*)

Not to us, O God, not us, but unto Your Name give glory!
For Your love and faithfulness, ever to Your Name be glory!
Why should the nations cry, “Where is their God on high?”
You rule us, Lord, on high: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Idols made by men’s own hand – ever to Your Name be glory –
See nor hear nor understand – ever to Your Name be glory!
They neither feel nor walk, nor can they speak or talk;
All those who serve them fall. But unto Your Name be glory!

The Law of God Miscellanies 1

For reflection or discussion

1. What is your understanding of the role of God's Law in the life of faith? Which aspects of God's Law apply to following Jesus?
2. According to Ezekiel 36.26, 27 and John 16.8-11, how does the Holy Spirit use the Law of God?
3. Why is it not a good idea to ignore or neglect the Law of God?
4. Paul says the goal of all instruction, including in the commandments of God, is love. Can we love God or our neighbors as we ought apart from the Law of God? Explain.
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from these articles on the Law of God? How are you planning to incorporate that lesson in your walk with and work for the Lord?

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.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.