

FOUNDATIONS
FOR CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

THE LAW OF GOD (7): GOD'S PEOPLE



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A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Foundations for Christian Worldview: The Law of God (7): God's People
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Welcome to *Foundations for Christian Worldview:
The Law of God (7): God's People*

From the beginning of the Bible, we see God busily working to create a people for Himself. He intended that they should know and serve Him, and be the beneficiaries of His precious and very great promises.

The entrance of sin to the world did not deter God in His plan to create a people. We see His grace at work choosing a man, entering a covenant with him, and through him creating a nation to be His holy people. He chose them, redeemed them, and gave them His Law, so that they might enjoy all the benefits of His grace and mercy.

God's plan to have a people for Himself begins to unfold in the Law of Moses. Here we learn many important lessons about what it means to be chosen, redeemed, called, and indwelt by God. The story of God's people – our story – begins in Moses' five books.

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 Made in God's Image

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Genesis 1.27

Chip off the old block

The basic meaning of the Hebrew root צלם, *tsalam*, is “cut off.” According to the definitive Hebrew lexicon, it refers to “something *cut out*” of wood or metal to represent something else. Of all the beings created by God, only one is referred to as “cut out” in His image: man. Men and women are the image-bearers of God. They are chips off the old Block, as it were, which means that, in many and various ways, human beings are not like the animals.

We share many genetic similarities with animals, but this is only what we might expect for beings that have come from one Creator and have their existence in a common world. But people are not animals. We are the image-bearers of God. We have reason. We communicate. We are creative, and we work with purpose, toward particular ends. We create culture which reflects our interests, tastes, and values.

But, it will be argued, many animals do similar things. Whales communicate, for example. Higher primates can reason. Even birds create culture, since they always make nests unique to their particular species.

The key word here is *similar*. Is this not what we might expect of beings inhabiting a common creation and sustained by a common Creator? And true as such assertions may be, they pale into insignificance when compared with the powers of human beings to communicate, work, create culture, enjoy beauty, and shape their environment.

Of all the beings God has created, humans are the most amazing of all, and not simply – as proponents of a secular worldview insist – because our brains are so far advanced beyond any in the animal kingdom; but because we are made in the image and likeness of God. We are *like* God. He has *stamped His image* on us.

What really sets people apart as the image-bearers of God is that we *know* and can *serve* the God Who made us. This means that people are not merely *material* beings, like the animals. We are *spiritual* beings, and are of such a composition as to allow us to connect with the ultimate Spiritual Being. As we continue our examination of the worldview vision emerging in the Law of God, we turn to the people God has created for Himself. God has made all people, and, like everything else in creation, they all belong to Him. But among all the peoples God has created, all of whom have fallen into sin and rebellion against Him, some have come to know His special favor; and in knowing His special favor, they have been and are being renewed in the knowledge of God and the mission He has appointed for them.

The ability to know God

The primary characteristic that makes human beings the image-bearers of God is that they know Him. Not merely *can* know Him, but *do* – all of them. We see this throughout the books of Moses, as pagan nations grope to connect with God by attaching themselves to all manner of false deities. There has never been a culture or people who have not indicated some sense of the transcendent, or contrived ways of seeking to engage it. Something in us insists that there is a higher power, a greater good, an ultimate truth, and we seek to connect with that ultimate reality by a wide variety of means.

All people know there is an ultimate something which is good, true, and most to be desired, and they seek that ultimate unseen something along many paths, most especially in our day, the path of secular materialism.

But like the pagan religions of the books of Moses, the pagan religions of our day are a dead end. They remind us that all people know God – know that He exists, and know something about His greatness and

desirability (cf. Rom. 1.18-21). But because of sin, the human ability to connect with what we all know – the true God – is obstructed. Only God can restore people to the true path that leads to right knowledge of God.

To know God is to fear, obey, serve, and love Him, as God Himself explains (Deut. 10.12, 13). This is the path of the good life which all people seek. We are the image-bearers of God, and only when we are rightly bound back (Latin: *religare*) to Him through faith and obedience can we expect to know the righteousness, peace, and joy we seek from the worldview we embrace. Animals cannot know God in this intimate, loving, humbling, and exhilarating way. The image-bearers of God are made to know Him, and they will only realize the highest hopes of their worldview when, as Augustine observed, their hearts come to rest in Him.

The mandate to serve God

People are called to serve God by being fruitful and by developing the goodness God has invested in His creation (Gen. 1.26-28; 2.15). The mandate assigned to the first human beings continues to be the defining commission of our lives. We are to serve God by bringing more people into being who know and serve Him. And we are to serve Him by developing the goodness He has invested in the world into ever greater measure and extent. This was Adam's charge in the garden: To serve – or develop – the garden, and to guard it against whatever might threaten its ability to realize increasing goodness and blessing.

Over and over God promised His people in the Law that He would increase them – like the stars of the heaven and the sands of the sea – and that He would cause them to enjoy a wide variety of blessings (cf. Deut. 28.1-14). God has given His people a clear mandate; and He provides the direction and power for them to fulfill that mandate.

But they must not balk at the opportunities God puts before them, like the people of Israel did at Kadesh Barnea (Num. 14.1-10). Instead, *loving* God and being committed to *servicing* Him, those who know Him must be strong and do exploits in line with their calling as His image-bearers and people (Dan. 11.32). Those good works begin in worship and spill out from there into every area of life, all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities, where the people who know the Three-in-One God serve Him out of hearts filled with wonder and love.

For reflection

1. God is remaking His people into His image (2 Cor. 3.12-18). Why is this re-make necessary?
2. We are created to know and serve God. How do these verbs come to expression in your life?
3. How would you explain to an unbelieving friend what it means to know God?

Next steps – Conversation: How can believers encourage one another in knowing and serving the Lord? Talk with some Christian friends about this question.

2 Fallen in Sin

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Genesis 3.6

The reality of sin

We have seen that sin is one of the great unseen realities of life that must be taken seriously if we hope to achieve a worldview grounded in truth and resulting in goodness. We said that sin is a spiritual malady that turns the heart and all the soul away from God and His Law, and that affects the entire creation of God in ways contrary to His good and perfect will. Sin became a condition among the image-bearers of God from very early on.

But how did that happen? What were the effects of sin's entrance to the human condition? And how did God move to help His people acknowledge and manage the effects of sin in their lives?

People were made in the image and likeness of God. They were without sin at the beginning; but, being creatures and *not* God, they were not perfect, either in their spiritual or physical aspects. That a threat to the good order and intentions of God lurked in the environs of the garden is clear from God's commanding Adam not only to develop the good potential of the creatures around him, but to *guard* the garden from the threat which God understood, and which Adam was expected to recognize if or when it appeared (Gen. 2.15). That should have been easy enough: Anything showing up in the garden that challenged the authority of God, or encouraged action contrary to the revealed will of God, was a threat to be resisted.

But when the serpent arrived in the garden, doing precisely that, Adam and Eve became transfixed with wonder and inflamed with the possibilities suggested by the notion that they might be not only *like* God, but *equal* to Him, or rather, God *themselves* (Gen. 3.1-4). Adam stood by and watched as his wife took the lead in believing and acting on the lie; and then he willingly complied in her rebellion against God.

Sin entered the garden because the first image-bearers of God chose to go beyond His revealed Word, to believe what was contrary to His revealed will, and to act in a manner indicating that they preferred themselves, rather than God, as the ultimate arbiters of good and evil, right and wrong, truth and the lie. That one act of rebellion introduced the spiritual blight of sin to the world – not merely to the souls of Adam and Eve, and all the children who would descend from them, but to the entire creation and all its creatures and conditions.

The effects of sin

The far-ranging effects of sin are immediately evident in the image-bearers of God. Let's note first, that the entrance of sin did not eradicate or destroy the knowledge of God. When God came into the garden to meet with His image-bearers, they knew His Presence, and they feared Him because of the consequences of their behavior (Gen. 3.8-10).

It isn't that people who are fallen in sin do not know God. They do. They simply choose to escape Him, in the vain belief that they are sufficient unto themselves for whatever role God might play in their lives (cf. Rom. 1.18-32). Sin does not *eradicate* the knowledge of God in His image-bearers, but it disturbs, mars, and corrupts it terribly, causing us to think wrongly about God and ourselves, and to act accordingly.

A second effect of sin, which we identify in Adam and Eve, is that they became afraid in their nakedness. They saw themselves as having no protection against the world, yet their feeble attempts to cover their vulnerabilities are laughable. Sin injects a misguided sense of fear into the souls of people, a fear that corrupts their understanding of themselves and their relationship to one another and the world, and that leads them to

seek ways of alleviating their fears. All such efforts are merely temporary and always insufficient. The fear of death itself haunts the souls of people, and they can never escape it by their own efforts (Heb. 2.15).

Third, sin intrudes a variety of hindrances and obstacles to human relationships, and thus, to life in community. Self-interest, blame-laying, alienation, isolation, mistrust – these are but a few of the corruptions which plague the souls of people, and remain to some extent even among those who are called the people of God.

Pain, sorrow, regret, anguish, turmoil, frustration, anger, depression – all these negative affections, which accompany our relationships, work, and even begetting and raising children – are the result of the separation from God and His Word occasioned by the reality of sin in the human experience. And, as we see in Genesis 4, sin and all its adverse consequences transfer to the offspring of sinful people by some mystery we cannot understand, but cannot deny. All have sinned, because all are sinners.

Even those whom God determines to call to Himself for their blessing and His glory.

Struggling against sin

God did not leave His people to the ruin of their sin. He has not abandoned His original plan for a world filled with goodness, tended, developed, and guarded by a people He has created for Himself and His glory. But God would have to address the issue of sin, since the nature of sin makes it impossible for human beings to prevail over it.

From the beginning, therefore, God promised the overthrow of sin by a “Seed of the woman” Who would destroy the very source of sin and the lie (Gen. 3.15). That promise was long-term. In the interim, God set before His people a raft of precious and very great promises (Gen. 12.1-3, 2 Pet. 1.4), to help them fix their eyes on Him and His blessings, rather than on the deceitful snares of sinful men and the world.

God also gave His people His Law, which sets forth the parameters for living in love for God and neighbor, and therefore indicates that which is to be avoided. The Law helped the people of God to identify sin, and it directed them in the path of righteousness that leads to the promised blessings of God.

But even those redeemed from slavery in Egypt were still sinners, and it would not suffice merely to hold out promises of blessing or to set forth the identifying marks of sin. The people would still sin, and they would need some ways, if only temporary – until the Seed comes – to overcome the consequences and shame of sin and to become right with God and their neighbors once again. The means for this God provided in the judicial and religious statutes of His Law, and the spiritual institutions by which He bound His people to Himself.

God's people are sinners, but we do not need to be *ruled* by sin, and we must take up the daily struggle to resist and overcome it by the good counsel of God and His Word. That was true of the people in Moses' day, and it is true of the people of God in our own.

For reflection

1. What is sin and how does it disrupt our relationship with God?
2. How can we recognize when sin is trying to deprive us of, or distract us from, the blessings of God?
3. What are the best ways of dealing with sin, when we discover its presence in our lives?

Next steps – Preparation: We cannot know sin apart from the Law of God (Rom. 7.7). What role does the Law have in your relationship with God? How could you improve that, following the teaching of Psalm 1?

3 Chosen by Grace

“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” Deuteronomy 7.6-8

What am I here for?

A question that every worldview seeks to answer addresses the reason for human beings, and for each of us individually: What am I here for? Does my life have a purpose? Am I supposed to be something? Do something? Achieve something? Or am I just a random product of natural causes in a universe that has no meaning? Is life absurd? Why am I here?

Every human being has to deal with this question in some form, and at various stages of life. Major life decisions are spin-offs of this question: What should I study in college? Should I get married? Should we have children? Should I accept this promotion, or this job offer? Should we take our children to church?

Within the framework of most worldviews, answering this question is a guessing game based on emotional satisfaction. We try to figure out some aspect of the answer to this question, then we make a choice, and try to make the choice work. As long as we feel good about our decision, and it seems to fit our emotional expectations, we continue in it. If not, we ask the question again and go looking – for a new job, a new hobby, a new mate, or any of a million new distractions.

Christians don't have to cast about for an answer to this question. God, Who made us, has also told us *why* He made us, and what's in store for us as we take our place with Him in the worldview framework of His Kingdom and glory, to which He calls us (1 Thess. 2.12).

To be brief: We are here because it pleases God to give us life, blessing, fellowship with Him, and the eternal bliss and privilege of His company and provision.

We are here because God chose us for Himself, out of the enormity of His unfathomable grace, that we might be a *peculiar* people of all the peoples in the world, to know, enjoy, serve, and glorify Him forever.

Here for God

Rick Warren began his widely-read book, *The Purpose Driven Life* (subtitled, “What on earth am I here for?”), by stating simply, “It's not about you.” Your life is not about you. If you think your life *is* about you, that is, *ultimately* about you, then you must think that you are God. But if you can set aside the tendency, natural to us all who are fallen in sin, of thinking that you are the center of the cosmos and that everyone should do for you, then you can begin to discover the real meaning and purpose of your life, which is to be found in God alone.

God chose the ancient people of Israel *for Himself*, as He said through Moses. But it's not that God was lonely, or that in His Three-in-Oneness He lacked something. Quite the contrary. It is that He *loves* us with an infinite, unfathomable, and irresistible love. So completely fulfilled, satisfied, and overflowing with joy and love are the members of the triune Godhead, that they desire others to know that same intimacy and fullness. This adds nothing to their joy; instead, it spreads joy to undeserving creatures who could never realize it on their own. God longs for His people to live within His love, participate in His being, experience His Presence, join in His work, and exercise His power, not because this does something for *Him*, but because it does so

much for *us*.

If we continue thinking that our lives are all about us, we'll spend them trying to attract people and things to ourselves, and we'll miss the ultimate point of human existence, which is to surrender to the attractational power of God's grace, and be drawn into fellowship with Him and those who know Him.

Here for holiness

In that context, then, we will discover, as God told His ancient people, that He intends us to be holy, as He Himself is holy. God is holy, and in His holiness, God lacks nothing; He is completely satisfied and fulfilled, abounds in joy and love, exercises remarkable creativity, does all things well, wants for nothing, and has an infinite supply of grace to overflow toward sinful people and their fallen world.

And He intends for His people to participate in that project.

People tend to equate the term *holiness* with something like, *straight-laced, sober, sad, and bored*. God is none of those things. He is holy. It the serpent's lie to make us believe that holiness is a condition to be avoided at all costs, or, at least, not something to become fanatical about.

But God has called His people to holiness, to be like Him, live like He does, rejoice as He does, love as He does, and fill the earth with goodness as He does. And the path for all this fullness and blessing is the path of holiness.

Here to bless

For only as we are immersed in God and pursuing holiness can we be a blessing to the world. This is what God promised the fathers, beginning with Abraham: That His people will bring the blessings of the knowledge of God and His glory to the world – all that fullness and joy and love and goodness and wonder and thrill of being alive. God's people are the blessing-bringers to the world. This is God's plan for us, as seen throughout the Law of God and all of Scripture.

God draws us to Himself. He fits us for holiness. He dispatches us to the world. And the world is set right again, back to that "very good" condition in which God made it at the beginning.

Why are we here? We are here for God. And for love. And for blessing. And for the glory of Him Who alone is able to make such a wonderful way of life possible. It's not about you or me; it's about God, and knowing His joy and bringing His blessings and goodness to our world.

It's all about grace.

For reflection

1. What is grace? Why is grace so important in the Christian worldview?
2. What does it mean for you be a blessing-bringer to your world? Is this how people regard you?
3. Why is holiness so much to be desired? Why do Christians exert so little energy in trying to increase in holiness (2 Cor. 7.1)?

Next steps – Transformation: What are the major components of your life? What's one thing you could do in each of those areas to begin bringing holiness to completion? Begin praying daily that God will allow you to increase in His holiness.

4 Saved through Faith

And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace." Exodus 14.13, 14

The deliverance from Egypt

The Law of Moses reports some of the most consequential events of redemption history: creation, fall, covenant, and above all, God's deliverance of His people from captivity in Egypt. The deliverance from Egypt is the great type of salvation to which the rest of Scripture refers, to demonstrate the saving grace and power of God, and the necessity of believing in Him for the salvation He freely offers.

No sooner had God graciously and powerfully wrested His people from the grip of Pharaoh, than their ungrateful, unbelieving hearts began to doubt. The Red Sea on their east, and the army of Pharaoh bearing down on them from the west, it seemed to the people of Israel that they had nowhere to go. Their deliverance had been a sham. Their hopes were not to be realized. And they began to complain against those who had persuaded them to prepare for the gracious and powerful salvation of the Lord: "Because *there were* no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? *Is* this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?' For *it would have been* better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness" (Ex. 14.11, 12).

This generation of adults would never be persuaded to put their full weight down on God. Though they saw Him, over and over, provide for their needs and defend them against their foes, yet they doubted His Word, balked at entering His promised land, and were condemned to die in the wilderness, without ever realizing the salvation God had prepared for them. The writer of Hebrews summarizes the tragic end of all who will not believe the Lord for salvation: "For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, *was it* not all who came out of Egypt, *led* by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? *Was it* not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Heb. 3.16-19).

The salvation of God comes to His chosen people freely, out of the infinite springs of His unfathomable grace. But that salvation must be *received* by those to whom it is offered, and it is received apart from any works on our part, but solely by *believing* in Him Who offers it. Moses shows us how that faith is to be expressed.

Do not be afraid.

"And Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid.'" Fear of man and circumstances is a powerful inhibitor of faith. The people of Israel feared they had lost what security they knew by trying to escape their Egyptian masters. They feared that their lives were over, and that they would be left to die in the desert. If they had feared God, their faith would have remained strong.

Fear can keep people from believing in the salvation of God. They fear they're losing life as they've always known it, even though what they've known has never completely satisfied them. They fear that, if they receive the Lord's salvation, they will deprive themselves of that good and true end for which they've hoped and worked all these years – however that end is conceived.

They fear to believe, and think they might prefer to continue languishing in their unsatisfactory bondage to sin rather than look confidently to the Lord.

To all such people the servants of the Lord must say, “Do not be afraid.”

Stand still!

“Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD ...” In Israel’s case, the alternative to standing still and waiting to see what God would do was to run for their lives – to flee the very work God was preparing to do on their behalf, relying on their own efforts to try to preserve something of what they feared they were about to lose.

God’s salvation comes to us all at once, but we don’t realize it all at once. We must wait on the Lord, looking to Him and His Word to unpack the full and abundant life we have in Jesus Christ. We must say to those to whom we offer the Lord’s salvation, “Don’t think your old life is better than this. Don’t put up resistance to the promises and grace of God. Stand still. Wait and see what God will do, as He brings His great gift to fruition in your soul.”

Waiting on the Lord, looking to His Word, and standing in faith before Him – however small the space of faith may be which we occupy at the moment – these are the steps of faith that will receive the gift of God’s gracious salvation.

Look to your peace.

“And you shall be at peace.” This is what Moses said to the frightened and doubting people of Israel. He urged them to look ahead to the result of God’s great salvation, what they would know once He had acted on their behalf. Ultimately, this peace – *rest*, as the writer of Hebrews has it – would not be fully realized until they entered, subdued, and occupied the land of promise, which they never quite fully managed to do.

But the promise of peace remains. We say to those who are afraid they will be giving up too much by believing the Gospel: “Look to the peace that passes understanding, the rest for your soul, the forgiveness of your sins, the removal of guilt and shame, and the power for making all things new – all the blessings of new life that come with trusting in Jesus.”

Faith is the *assurance of things hoped for* – a true and better life of peace and hope – and the *evidence of things not seen* – that God’s Word is true, and that He will act for our salvation as we put aside our fears and stand still in Him and His Word (cf. Heb. 11.1).

Salvation and the full, true, good, and glorious life of righteousness, peace, and joy salvation brings, come to those who fear God, stand on His Word and wait for Him to act, and who look to the exceeding great and precious promises that are ours to enjoy in Jesus Christ.

For reflection

1. How does fear operate to keep Christians from growing in their salvation? If we’re not growing in our salvation, should this be a matter of concern? Explain.
2. What does it mean to “Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD”? How would you explain this to an unbelieving friend?
3. The peace we know in Jesus is a peace that passes all understanding (cf. Jn. 14.27; Phil. 4.6, 7). How would you explain that peace to an unbelieving friend?

Next steps – Preparation: Put together a presentation of the Gospel based on the instructions Moses gave to the people of Israel: “Do not be afraid. Stand still and see the Lord’s salvation. Look to the promise of peace.” Try sharing that presentation with an unbelieving friend.

5 Saved to Worship

“*And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*” These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.” Exodus 19.6

Worshippers all

In a climactic scene in the film, “Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves”, Robin is out to rescue the maid Marian from the evil sheriff of Nottingham. It’s a risky enterprise, involving being launched over a wall on a catapult into the courtyard beyond, without knowing where he might land. He is accompanied by his Moorish companion, Azeem, who asks Robin, just before they are both hurled over the wall, “Is she worth it?” Robin affirms that she is, and over the wall they go.

Don’t miss that word: “worth.” What Robin was doing is the essence of *worship*; and it reminds us that, like Robin Hood, everybody has something which they regard as of such great *worth*, that they will take significant risks or undergo arduous endeavors and repetitious rituals and services to achieve it. Whatever it is, that objective of great worth possesses a certain *worth ship* that makes it, in effect, an object of *worship*. The worship we give such objects is expressed in the things we do in pursuit of it, whether it’s surmounting a wall to rescue a maiden in distress or putting in 40 years of 9-to-5 for a retirement by the lake. That thing which is for us most ultimate in goodness and truth is *worth* the effort we make to attain it, and the effort we make to attain it is our *reasonable service of worship* (Rom. 12.1).

We are all worshipers, every human being, and everyone in his or her own worldview. We are all in pursuit of some objective which we regard to be of such great worth, that we will undertake those activities – over and over again – that we consider to be *reasonable* for obtaining our objective. We are made for worship. And if we will not worship God as He intends, then we will worship some object of our own devising, thus exalting that object to the status of supreme good and truth – a god of their own devising (cf. Rom. 1.18-32).

As we have seen, God alone is the only true and ultimate good, because of all He is and all He does. He alone is *worthy* of a life defined by a *reasonable service of worship*. In the worship of God, the people of God find their greatest fulfillment, most complete satisfaction, greatest joy, and most enduring peace. It is good to worship God, first, because He is *worthy* of our worship, and second, because we as His people realize our highest purpose and most abundant life in worshiping Him.

The worship to which God calls us consists of two aspects.

A holy nation

Why did God save the people of Israel from Egypt? He tells us: That they might be a *holy nation* unto Him. Holiness consists in living like God in all the everyday situations and circumstances of our lives. Israel did not have to guess about what holiness required of them. God gave His holy and righteous and good Law so that His people could discern from it how they must conduct themselves, in all their relationships, roles, and responsibilities, as a holy people unto the Lord.

To live in the holiness of God is to know the favor and Presence of God, and thus, in a certain measure at least, to realize that which is ultimately good and true. Building on the foundation laid in God’s Law, the Christian worldview is about knowing God; and we may know Him with us in each of the moments and activities of our lives, as we walk the path of holiness.

Israel was called to acknowledge the *worth ship* of God by learning and obeying His Law. God prescribed the Law as *reasonable* for His people, because He had created and redeemed them, and He knows best what can enable people to realize their greatest good, which is to know and serve Him.

Thus, worship is a way of life for those who know the salvation of the Lord, as, indeed, it is for everyone. Everything His people do, we must do unto Him – to know, serve, enjoy, please, and dwell with Him. The Law of God, which He gave as Israel's reasonable service for knowing and obeying Him, addresses every aspect of human life. Thus, it makes of every human life an ongoing service of worship in which we do everything *unto* the Lord so that we may *know and please* the Lord and *refract His truth and love* to the world.

A kingdom of priests

But God also called His people to participate in certain personal and corporate activities, beyond the scope of daily business, by which they might increase in the knowledge of Him. Israel's reasonable service of worship included such personal disciplines as prayer, singing, reading God's Law, fasting, and making and keeping vows, and such corporate rituals as offerings, Sabbaths, holy feasts, hearing the Word of God taught, and joining to praise, thank, and supplicate God as a people together. Just as He did not leave them to figure out the best ways of conducting their *daily* service of worship, God provided in His Law officers to lead in worship and practices to use when they came together, which were fraught with meaning and power to connect God's people with Him.

These personal and corporate rituals reinforced and shaped their daily service of worship; and their daily service of worship prepared them for seeking and enjoying His Presence in their personal and corporate rituals.

God called Israel to be a kingdom of priests. He was their King, and His Law guided His people in the proper ways of worshiping Him. He established a pattern for worship together with forms and guidelines, and He discouraged adding to His pattern and guidelines by any who might think they knew better than God how He ought to be worshiped (cf. Lev. 10.1-3).

God's people were created, redeemed, and saved by God to worship Him, both in their everyday lives and their corporate experience. The Christian worldview finds its fullest expression and realization in worship, just as God intended from the beginning.

Questions for reflection

1. Why are our daily activities *reasonable services* for worshiping God? How might we make them more so?
2. Of what does the worship in your church consist? What do you do in worship? Are you confident that this is everything God is seeking in corporate worship? Is it more than He is seeking? What is the purpose of worship in your church?
3. Our daily spiritual disciplines are crucial components in a life of worship. What role do these disciplines play in your life?

Next steps – Preparation: What can you do to help your worship – daily and corporate – be more of what God intends? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.

6 Saved for the Law

“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

Such statutes and judgments

To understand the proper place of the Law of God in the life of His people, we must always bear in mind that the Law was given *after* God had delivered the people to Himself at Mt. Sinai. Israel had already realized the first step of His saving grace. God had wrested them from the hand of Pharaoh and the misery of slavery, escorted them through the Red Sea, and brought them safely to the mountain to worship Him.

The operative power in this great work of deliverance was the grace of God *only*. God was *remembering* His promises to their fathers (Ex. 2.24, 25), and He carried out all the actions necessary for their deliverance. All they had to do was *believe* to receive the salvation He accomplished – to not be afraid, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, and look forward to enjoying His peace.

At Mt. Sinai, God showed a further measure of His grace to His people, by giving them His holy and righteous and good Law. The Law outlined the Lord's requirements for Israel to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, a people who lived in love for God and their neighbors in communities that flourished in justice, righteousness, peace, and holy worship. The Law was given to show God's people how to live in the freedom He had provided for them. The Law – in its commandments, civil statutes, and religious rules – speaks to every area of life. It provides the keys to wisdom and understanding, and outstrips in beauty, simplicity, and fairness all the laws of all the other nations of that day or this.

God saved Israel to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation; He saved them to learn, love, obey, and delight in His Law – statutes and righteous judgments such as the world had never seen before, and has never known since.

Israel was not saved *by* keeping the Law, but *for* keeping it – unto wisdom, understanding, and the admiration of the nations.

For wisdom and understanding

Keeping God's Law would make Israel a wise people. They would relate to one another and conduct all their affairs with a skill in living that set them apart from all their neighbors. They would flourish as individuals and communities, because the Law showed them the way to full and abundant life, life as God intended it from the beginning (Lev. 18.1-5). In their wisdom and obedience, they would realize all the promises of God for blessing in every area of their lives (Deut. 28.1-14).

The more God's people kept the Law, the more *thinking like God Himself* would inform all their daily activities. The Law speaks to every area of human life, but not specifically. It sets up patterns and templates for thinking about all of life. The more God's people practiced what the Law *explicitly* commanded, the more they would understand how to apply the Law in those areas where the Law was silent. One example from the Law will illustrate this.

In Numbers 27.1-11, a question arose to which the Law as given by God did not speak explicitly. A man named Zelophehad had died as part of the rebellion of Korah, which God suppressed. This man had no

sons, who, by the express teaching of the Law, might have been in line to inherit his possession in the land of Canaan. Instead, Zelophehad had five very astute daughters. They presented themselves before Moses, insisting that they were the lawful heirs of Zelophehad's possessions, since he had no sons. Moses was not quite sure how to respond, so he took the matter to the LORD. The LORD replied by saying that the daughters of Zelophehad had judged rightly – they had understood what the Law *implied* but did not expressly *teach* – and that they should be given their father's portion in the land of promise. Then God amended His own Law to make sure this important precedent was not forgotten in the days to come.

Israel had been saved as the people of God to obey His Law. As they did, they would increase in wisdom and understanding above all the nations around them.

And this would get the attention of their neighbors, for sure.

For the nations

Seeing the wisdom and understanding of God's people, and how they flourished in glorious worship, diligent neighbor love, and the blessings of goodness on every hand, the neighboring nations would say "Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people." As both Isaiah (2.1-4) and Micah (4.1-8) would later testify, the Law of God, lived out before the nations of the world, has attracting power. It gets people's attention, piques their curiosity, heightens their interest, causes them to introspect, and draws them toward the context in which that Law is consistently obeyed, and to the Giver of that Law Who rules there.

The Law was never intended to save. It should not be regarded as a burden or yoke too great to bear. The Law liberates us from foolishness to wisdom, from ignorance and confusion to understanding, and from irrelevance to prominence in the affairs of men and nations. This is what God intended for His people, and it is why He saved us for His Law.

Questions for reflection

1. Read Psalm 1. What does this psalm recommend, and what does it promise, for those who make good use of God's Law?
2. Are wisdom and understanding important traits for Christians? Why? Can we realize these apart from God's Law?
3. How would you explain to a new believer the role of the Law of God in the life of faith?

Next steps – Transformation: Review your answers to the three questions above. Make a plan to allow the Law of God a larger place in your walk with and work for the Lord. Implement your plan right away, and ask a Christian friend to pray for you as you do.

7 Saved as a Kingdom

*“Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise;
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
Your father’s children shall bow down before you.
Judah is a lion’s whelp;
From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He bows down, he lies down as a lion;
And as a lion, who shall rouse him?
The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes;
And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.* Genesis 49:8-10

Intimations of rule

From the very beginning, God intended His people to rule the earth so that His goodness might flourish and abound in all His creatures, throughout all creation (Gen. 1:26-31). Adam and Eve were charged with having dominion over all the works God had made, to identify, order, shape, cultivate, serve, and guard them, that each might fulfill its purpose in the divine economy, and reflect in the goodness of God their Creator.

The garden of Eden, therefore, was the first indication that God had created His people for a Kingdom where His pleasure and goodness would be served and all His creatures would flourish.

After the fall into sin, God continued to impress His people with the idea of a kingdom and a rule. He gave Noah dominion over every living thing, and commissioned him to revive the work of his first parents (Gen. 6-9). God promised Abraham that his wife, Sarah, would “be a *mother of nations*; kings of peoples shall be from her” (Gen. 17:16). To Abraham’s grandson, Jacob, God continued this promise of rulers and kingdoms, uniting that vision of His covenant’s future with the mandate given from the very beginning: “Also God said to him: ‘I *am* God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body’” (Gen. 35:11).

Once the unbelieving generation of Israelites had died in the wilderness, God prepared their faithful children to go forward in claiming the promises associated with the land of Canaan. He told them that, once they had settled in their respective places, He would be pleased to give them a king, but only on His terms: “When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, I will set a king over me like all the nations that *are* around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who *is* not your brother. But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, You shall not return that way again.’ Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself. 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” (Deut. 17:14-20).

The people God calls to Himself as a holy nation are a people intended for a Kingdom, a people destined to rule for the goodness and glory of God.

A dynasty for Judah

In Jacob's blessing of his son, Judah, God provides a further glimpse of His Kingdom design for His people (Gen. 49:8-12). Jacob prophesied that God would establish a dynasty of kings, descending from Judah (v. 10). These kings would rule the people of God and receive their praise and honor (v. 8). They would protect Israel from their enemies and rule over them according to the Law of God (vv. 8, 10). They would be fierce, resembling a lion in every way (v. 9).

This dynasty, Jacob continued, would endure from the first anointed king to the coming of *Shiloh*, a Hebrew contraction which may be translated, "Him Whose it Is." Shiloh is the final King; the Judaic dynasty ends with Him.

One is coming, descending from the loins of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah, for Whom the rule of God's people has been prepared, and the rule of all the peoples of the earth (v. 10: Hebrew, *peoples*, not *people* as in the NKJV). When Shiloh comes, the dynasty of kings ends. Shiloh receives the scepter of rule (cf. Ps. 45:6), and by fulfilling, teaching, and enforcing the Law of God, brings the promises of God's covenant to fullness (v. 10).

How shall the people know when this final and greatest King has at last arrived?

Donkey and vine, wine and milk

Shiloh will come on a donkey, and He will come like a vine. His garments will be stained with "the blood of grapes", though He – as seen by His teeth – will be as pure as milk (v. 12). This is the One for Whom the Kingdom has been prepared, the Kingdom first hinted at with Adam, then promised through the patriarchs and Moses. This One will be lowly and blood-stained, pure and fierce, and "to Him *shall be* the obedience of the peoples."

He will destroy His foes like a lion, and He will bind Himself to His people like a vine, that they might be fruitful. His vision – reflected in His eyes – is of a fruitful vineyard and a vintage harvest (v. 12). He will thus embody the Kingdom over which He reigns, and to which He summons all His people to seek, giving Him all praise and honor and glory as they do.

And this great King will be the ultimate Lawgiver, explaining, fulfilling, and leading the people of God into all the fullness of His Law and all the blessings of His covenant. For thus He will indeed prolong *his* days in His Kingdom, He and His children, in righteousness, peace, and joy forever.

Questions for reflection

1. God intended from the beginning that His people should rule in all creation. Is this still true today? In what sense?
2. As we know, Shiloh has come in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. How should knowing this help us in applying Matthew 6.10 and Matthew 6.33 in our everyday lives?
3. Why is the Kingdom of Shiloh "Good News"?

Next steps – Preparation: Jesus proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom – not just the Gospel of forgiveness and eternal life. What's the difference? Which Gospel are you following?

Foundations for Christian Worldview: The Law of God (7): God's People

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Why did God create a people for Himself? What kind of people were they to be?
2. How would you explain the role of grace, faith, and Law in the lives of God's people?
3. What do we mean by a "pattern" of worship for God's people?
4. What kind of Kingdom did God intend for His people? How does that relate to us today?
5. What's the most important lesson you've gained from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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