

3. The Law as Teacher (4Q 2020—Education)

Biblical Material: Deut. 6:5; Deut. 31:9–27; Rom. 3:19–23; Rev. 12:17; 14:12; Mark 6:25–27; Heb. 5:8.

Quotes

- It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me, and I think that’s pretty important. *Martin Luther King, Jr*
- The law of love could be best understood and learned through little children. *Mahatma Gandhi*
- The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions. *John Locke*
- Justice? -You get justice in the next world, in this world you have the law. *William Gaddis*
- Legalism says God will love us if we change. The gospel says God will change us because He loves us. *Tullian Tchividjian*
- There are laws. There are rules. And when you break them, there are consequences. Laws of nature and laws of life. Laws of love and laws of death. *Amy Harmon*

Questions

How can we see the law as a teacher and not as an arbitrary enforcer of rules? How does this fit into the subject of education? How would education proceed if there was no law? What are the dangers of emphasizing law? What about the concept of natural law and its impact on us? How do we avoid the charge of legalism when we start talking about the law?

Bible summary

The law is summed up in Deuteronomy, quoted by Jesus: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your mind and with all your being and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5 FBV). Moses communicates the Law to the people, and it is written down and placed in the Ark (Deut. 31:9–27). Paul talks about being made right apart from the Law (Rom. 3:19–23). Rev. 12:17 describes those who keep the commandments of God and who have the testimony of Jesus. “The believers must patiently endure, keeping God’s commandments and trusting in Jesus.” (Rev 14:12 FBV). Mark 6:25–27 is the execution of John the Baptist. “Even though he was God’s Son, Jesus learned practically the meaning of obedience through suffering.” (Heb. 5:8 FBV).

Comment

“The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ,” says Galatians 3:24 in the KJV. Some have seen this “schoolmaster” as a stern disciplinarian. However the word in the Greek (*paidagōgos*) means a child’s guardian or tutor, one in fact who took the child to school. This is a very different concept which shows us that Paul was seeing the law in a very positive light—just like a valued member of the household who was entrusted with the care and education of young children.

God gives the law for clarity—so that we rebels can know where we’re going wrong. It is not as a way of salvation, or to crush us, but to establish the true character of God and the nature

of his universe. This is the way it is. Good is good; evil is evil; and as we become remade in God's image, the more we agree with him on the intrinsic nature of good and evil.

In the words of George E. Fifiield, "Satan has always said that God's law was arbitrary and unjust, and his government tyrannical. By this means he seeks to justify his secession from that government, and his attempt to exalt his own throne above the stars of God... Notwithstanding Satan's cavils, the law is a divine revelation of infinite, unchanging love..."

Our appreciation for God's moral laws should be the same as for his physical laws. We see how the laws of the universe operate. We recognize we can "defy" the law of gravity, but it will be to our detriment! The same is true of all of God's laws—which are there to provide order and protection, not to impose some arbitrary divine whim. We should be glad for God's laws of order that prevent everything descending into chaos.

Jesus defines the greatest "law" as loving God—totally and absolutely. This then leads to our loving everyone else, for God is love and does just that himself. (Matt 22:37, 38). Thus growing into love will be a consequence of knowing and being with God—it is an inescapable result. This is what Paul describes as Christ living in me—not that we lose our individuality or responsibility, but that like Christ we do not live for ourselves. Our responsibility is to hear the truth about God, and help others recognize the winsome character of God. We are called to teach the truth in love, and *grow up!*

So we can appreciate the law, since it is a way of seeing ourselves, not to criticize or condemn, but to be realistic about who we are. In this way we begin to see how the character of God operates in practice, not as rules and regulations, but something more like natural law which defines the way things are, the principles of cause and effect. God wants us to understand our situation and to realize that it is only through him that we can really be all he wants us to be. As we come closer to him, we recognize our faults and failings, and want to be change into his image once more.

Ellen White comments

The law of love calls for the devotion of body, mind, and soul to the service of God and our fellow men. And this service, while making us a blessing to others, brings the greatest blessing to ourselves. Unselfishness underlies all true development. Through unselfish service we receive the highest culture of every faculty. {CT 32}

The law is our teacher, instructing us as to what is rectitude and perfection of character, in order that through the righteousness of Christ we may have a living connection with God. {ST, October 22, 1894}

Christ came to our world to represent the character of God as it is represented in His holy law, for His law is a transcript of His character. Christ was both the law and the gospel. . . . {CTr 339}

It is a law of the mind that it gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is trained to dwell... As an educating power, the Bible is without a rival. In the word of God the mind finds subject for the deepest thought, the loftiest aspiration. The Bible is the most instructive history that men possess... The curtain that separates the visible from the invisible world is lifted, and we behold the conflict of the opposing forces of good and evil, from the first entrance of sin, to the final triumph of righteousness and truth; and all is but a revelation of the character of God. {CE 65.1}