

The Purpose of the Law

LAWBREAKERS, BUT NOT LAWLESS

Believers are lawbreakers, but are not lawless! Every true child of God delights in the law of God after the inward man' and mourns when he breaks it. But he does not live a lawless and licentious life."

Paul Mahan

Free grace no more makes a person want to sin than health makes a person want to get sick again. The notion of sovereign grace giving people a license to sin is the foolish excuse of Pharisees who are not willing to give up their own righteousness.

Paul Mahan

The law is lawfully used as a means of conviction of sin: for this purpose it was promulgated (established) at Sinai. The law entered, that sin might abound: not to make men more wicked, though occasionally and by abuse it has that effect, but to make them sensible how wicked they are. Having God's law in our hands, we are no longer to form our judgments by the maxims and customs of the world, where evil is called good, and good evil; but are to try every principle, temper, and practice, by this standard. Could men be prevailed upon to do this, they would soon listen to the Gospel with attention. On some the Spirit of God does thus prevail: then they earnestly make the jailer's inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" Here the work of grace begins; and the sinner, condemned in his own conscience, is brought to Jesus for life.

When we use the law as a glass to behold the glory of God, we use it lawfully. His glory is eminently revealed in Christ; but much of it is with a special reference to the law, and cannot be otherwise discerned. We see the perfection and excellence of the law in his life. God was glorified by his obedience as a man. What a perfect character did he exhibit! Yet it is no other than a transcript of the law. Such would have been the character of Adam and all his race, had the law been duly obeyed. It appears therefore a wise and holy institution, fully capable of displaying that perfection of conduct by which man would have answered the end of his creation. And we see the inviolable strictness of the law in his death, There the glory of God in the law is manifested. Though he was the beloved Son, and had yielded personal obedience in the utmost perfection, yet, when he stood in our place to make atonement for sin, he was not spared. From what he endured in Gethsemane and upon the cross, we learn the meaning of that awful sentence, "The soul that sinneth shall die."

John Newton

We use the law lawfully when we use it as a test whereby to judge of the exercise of grace. Believers differ so much from what they once were, and from what many still are, that without this right use of the law, comparing themselves with their former selves, or with others, they would be prone to think more highly of their attainments than they ought. But when they recur to this standard (the Law), they sink into the dust, and adopt the language of Job, "Behold, I am vile; I cannot answer thee one of a thousand."

John Newton