

“God’s Law and the Priority of Grace”

Exodus 20:1-2; Matthew 5:17-20

INTRODUCTION: THREE KINDS OF BIBLICAL LAW

- 1. Ceremonial Law:** laws about worship (e.g., sacrifices, priests), national holidays (e.g., Passover, Feast of Booths), and purity (e.g., food, cleansing, leprosy). E.g., Lev. 1:1-7:38; 16:1-34
 - These laws pointed to what Jesus would accomplish when He came.
 - Heb 10:1: sacrificial laws were ‘a shadow of the good things to come and not the realities themselves.’
 - Col 2:17: these laws were ‘a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.’
 - Under the New Testament, these laws are no longer in effect. Eph 2:11-16; Acts 10:9-16, 28-29; Heb 9:8-10
- 2. Judicial Law:** laws for Israel as a nation-state; i.e., civil laws (e.g., property rights, treatment of family, foreigners, slaves, & animals, laws on warfare). E.g., Exodus 21:1-23:13; Dt 20:1-21:23
 - Under the New Testament, these laws ceased when Israel ended as a theocracy (rule of Israel by God’s laws).
 - We are not obligated to obey the judicial laws *except in ways they embody general principles of justice*.
 - Ex 22:21-22: ‘You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him....You shall not afflict any widow or orphan.’
 - Lev 19:36: ‘Use honest scales and honest weights’ in your business transactions.
 - Ex 21:23-25; Lev. 24:17-20: ‘an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’ = the punishment should fit the crime
- 3. Moral Law:** these laws are revealed in the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21
 - The Ten Commandments are called “words” in Hebrew. Ex 20:1: “And God spoke all these words, saying...”
 - In Genesis 1:3-29 God used 10 words to create order in the physical world of the heavens and earth.
 - In Exodus 20:1-17 God spoke 10 words to create order in society.
 - The moral law is normative for all time and all people.
 - Jesus’ coming fulfilled the Law—but did not abolish it. **See Mt 5:17-19**; Cf. Mt 7:12; 24:35; Lk 16:16-17→ The God of the Bible is the God of Law. His Law reflects the character of God. The character of God is good. Therefore, the Law is good.

THE PREFACE TO THE 10 COMMANDMENTS & THE PRIORITY OF GRACE

- 1. Before God gave Israel the Ten Commandments, He told them what He did on their behalf: *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves.***
- 2. The Preface to the Ten Commandments shows that God has the rightful authority to rule us.**
 - He is the LORD—the One who created you and defeated the gods of Egypt.
- 3. The Preface to the Ten Commandments shows that our call to obey flows out of God’s act of redemption.**
 - God commands us to obey based upon and in response to His rescue out of slavery in Egypt.
- 4. The Preface to the Ten Commandments shows us the ‘priority of grace.’**
 - Obedience to God is a product of His salvation—not a pre-requisite for His salvation.
 - God’s work of redemption/grace/salvation... prompts/instigates... our obedience. NOT the other way around.

The ‘priority of grace’ is found throughout the Bible...

- Rom 12:1-2: *I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy & pleasing to God...*
 - Colossians 3:12: *And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...*
 - Ephesians 5:1-2: *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you...*
 - Titus 2:11-12: *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires, and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age...*
 - See also Luke 1:74-75; John 15:12; Romans 6:1-7, 11-13; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:1-2; 5:7-8
- As Christians, are we to live a life of grace or a life of holiness? Answer: YES. It is not one or the other.

Ideas Worth Pondering...

From Alexis de Tocqueville's work *Democracy in America* (written in 1835):

"In New England, each citizen learns the elementary concepts of human knowledge; beyond that he is taught the doctrines and evidence of his religion. He undergoes instruction on the history of his country and the principal features of its constitution. In Connecticut and Massachusetts you will seldom find a man who has only an inadequate knowledge of these things and anyone completely unaware of them is quite an oddity.

It cannot be doubted that, in the United States, the education of the people powerfully contributes to the maintenance of the democratic republic. That will always be so, in my view, wherever education to enlighten the mind is not separated from that responsible for teaching morality.

In the United States, the general thrust of education is directed toward political life; in Europe, its main aim is to fit men for private life, as the citizens' involvement in public affairs is too rare an event for anything to be done about it in advance.

I think that if we fail to introduce and gradually set up democratic institutions in France, and that if we abandon the attempt to inspire all citizens with the ideas and feelings which first of all prepare them for freedom and consequently allow them to enjoy it, there will be no independence for anyone, neither for the middle classes, nor the nobility, nor the poor, nor the wealthy, but only an equal tyranny for all."

From *A Narrative of the Great Revival Which Prevailed in the Southern Armies During the Late Civil War between the States of the Federal Union* (by William W. Bennett. Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1877.):

An officer once complained to General Andrew Jackson that some soldiers were making a noise in their tent. "What are they doing?" asked the General. "They are praying now, but they have been singing," was the reply. "And is that a crime?" the General demanded. "The articles of war order punishment for any unusual noise," was the reply. "God forbid that prayer should be an unusual noise in my camp," said Jackson, and advised the officer to join the praying band.

-Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), former General Secretary of the Italian Communist Party:

"Socialism is precisely the religion that must overwhelm Christianity. ... In the new order, Socialism will triumph by first capturing the culture via infiltration of schools, universities, churches and the media by transforming the consciousness of society."

From the original introduction to Cecil B. DeMille's 1956 movie "The Ten Commandments":

"The theme of this picture is whether man ought to be ruled by God's law or whether they are to be ruled by the whims of a dictator like Rameses. Are men the property of the State—or are they free souls under God? This same battle continues throughout the world today."