

The Law: Part I

Eternal Origin: Love and Law

There is much in the news regarding the law. A person may be thinking of civil law, moral law, church law, and or God's law. Some people raise the issue of whose law, for what reason. Others ask such questions as how much law keeping is necessary and required and for what reasons. In the political scene of today (2018-20), some may wonder if there are consequences for lawbreaking and if so what? Teachers especially in public and government schools face these questions regularly. Where will we go to answer these types of questions? Since there are laws, it makes sense to find the lawgiver and learn about him and his ways. Is there an ultimate lawgiver and if so where do we go to meet him?

The dictionary defines law as a set of rules that are advisable and or obligatory to observe. Law carries with it the idea of a rule maker, the product of his thinking and action, who gives and enforces laws for a purpose. Law is always linked to a lawgiver, his standard for lawgiving and lawkeeping, and a lawkeeper. Where should we begin in our search regarding law? Let's begin with God. The reasons will become apparent. Others refuse to begin or even consult God in the matter of law. Let's focus on eternity. Only the Triune God was present. There was unity and diversity in the three-in-one God. Within the Trinity there was perfect order and harmony. Lawmaking and lawkeeping was present in eternity past. There was Intratrinitarian lawmaking and lawkeeping.

Next consider heaven before the creation of the world. There was and is order in heaven. Read Revelation chapters 4, 5, and 21-22. There was much activity that is directed and controlled, by rules and the Rulemaker. Moreover, fallen angels broke the law (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Revelation 20:13). Rules have been around eternally.

Now let's focus on the Garden of Eden before the fall. God added man to His creation, wrote the moral law on his heart, and created man His image bearer (Romans 1:18-20; 2:14-15; Genesis 1:26-28). As part of God relationship with Adam and Eve, God gave them law – three positive commands (fruitful, subdue, and rule) and one negative command - don't eat (Genesis 1:28; 2:16-17). Rules have been present eternally even before sin entered into the world. They have a relational aspect. There is a Lawmaker and a Lawgiver - the eternal God. Therefore, rules and laws are good because God is good.

Since God is relational (within the Trinity and God to man), man, as His image bearer is relational. Every relationship requires some set of rules by some standard. Moreover, since God is ethical and religious, so, too, is man as His image bearer. Religion, morality, and ethics did not evolve. They are God's design for man and His world. Since God is the Lawgiver, the law is good (Romans 7:12; 1 Timothy 1:8-11). Many today disagree with these conclusions.

Adam in the Garden was not excluded from lawkeeping (obedience). However, he set himself as lawmaker and he followed the examples of the fallen angels. He became a law unto himself. He was the lawgiver. The issue was not the presence of law and lawkeeping but whose law.

As a result of Adam's sin and God's judgment, sin and misery entered into the world (Romans 5:12-14). As a consequence, man took a completely different view of the God, himself, and law. Such is the problem today. Acknowledged or not man does not

correctly understand God or himself (Romans 1:18-23). He substitutes himself as the lawgiver and lawkeeper for his glory. Man is on a collision course with God daily unless there is a supernatural change in man. An eternal non-negotiable truth proclaims that there is only one Lawgiver and He is God. Man does set rules, but they are to be in accordance with a proper biblical understanding of the Lawgiver and lawkeeping.

Return your focus to heaven which is every believer's destiny. There is much activity. The saints in heaven are the recipients of Christ's perfect lawkeeping as an act of love: to the Father and to fellow saints. They are enjoying fellowship with God because of it. Love and lawkeeping are linked.

In Romans 13:8-10, Paul wrote that the debt of love – to love others - is forever. He summed up the fulfillment of the law in the same way that John did and that Jesus did (1 John 4:7-12; Matthew 22:37-40). Love is the fulfillment of the law. The Bible has terms for Jesus: Light, Life, and Truth. But Christ as Lawgiver and Lawkeeper is Lover par excellence. He demonstrated this fact by pleasing His Father and completing His work (John 4:31-34). Love, truth, light, and light meet in the Godhead.

Moreover, Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:13, Paul wrote that love is the greatest of faith, hope, and love. It will continue eternally. Love points to the law, the one Lawkeeper, and the One Lawgiver. Law without love is not law God's way and love without law is not love God's way. The two are linked (John 14:15, 21, 23). Rules matter. The fulfillment of the law is via love and the fulfillment of love comes only because of the law. Lawkeeping began in eternity past, begins here on the earth as believers' apply Matthew 22:37-40 daily: love of God and love of neighbor summarizes the law. The law facilitates love and love accentuates the law. The law gives insight and wisdom into Who God is, the essence of the cross, and man as a lawbreaker.

Application:

1. What is your view of law/rules, the Lawgiver, and Christ the Lawkeeper?
2. What effect does the fact that law has existed with God since eternity past have on you?
3. Biblically, think of some purposes of the law (for starters, you may want to look at Romans 3:19; 4:15; 5:20-21; 7:7-12).

The Law: Part B The Purpose of the Law

Law and order are eternal because God is a God of order and peace (1 Corinthians 14:33). Although the passage is normally associated with worship and church life, it does describe God's nature. God orders His world according to non-negotiable truths. God can't lie - He is truth and a truth teller (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2). These facts alone indicate that God is trustworthy - He makes promises and keeps them. He can't deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:11-13). God does not change. Therefore, His promises do not change. He gives Law – the Ten Commandments and the moral law which is written in the heart of all people – for several reasons. Lawmaking and lawgiving is part of His nature; man is His image bearer; and it best for mankind.

In terms of law these truths about God are significant. God gave Israel the Law (the Ten Words or Commandments) and prefaced the giving of the Law with the words recorded in Exodus 20:1-2: *I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt out of the house of slavery*. God's statement about Himself and His relationship with Israel can be summarized in seven "P's": He is personal, present, powerful, a promise-maker, a planner, purposeful, and provides for His people. He had delivered His people in a mighty way from Egypt and from their bondage, hardness, and misery. This delivery pointed to the great delivery in Christ.

After the giving of the Ten Words, Moses spoke to the fearful, hesitant, confused people: *...Do not be afraid. God has come to test you that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning* (Exodus 20:20). The passage gives a summary statement about God and the giving of the Law. The Law was given as an antidote for competing with God (Romans 7:12; 1 Timothy 1:8-11). Moses proscribed fear. He was not referring to fear of God; otherwise Moses would not have added the motivation for the giving of the Law. The law was to be one of God's tools for Israel to keep the nation from sinning. Fear of the Lord is designed to do that just that. Rather, Moses is speaking of fear of man which is actually a self-focus on control. Moses taught the people, and us, that the purpose of the Law is a good one. Rather than sinfully fearing God and His providence hoping to control the situation and outcome, the people were to put on wisdom - that is, fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7: *fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*). Here wisdom and trust are synonymous. Mankind has two basic choices that every person faces daily: trust in God or self. The Law was intended to help people to choose to trust God.

God was in the business of growing wise people. His people were to be true reflectors of Him. Rightly understood, Moses taught the people one of the purposes of the Law: the development of wisdom. Wise people understand sin for what it is. They use the Law to examine themselves and to grow in wisdom and Christlikeness.

Properly understood, lawkeeping is a way of life for the believer. His relationship to the Law has changed. God and Law have not changed. The believer has changed. He views lawgiving and lawkeeping from God's perspective and not his own. God in His word teaches that the Law shows the way of life for the believer (Leviticus 18:5; Ezekiel 20:11, 13, 21; John 14:15, 21, 23). In those last passages found in John's gospel, Jesus told the apostles: *if you love me keep my commands*. Obedience is linked to wisdom and love. Lawkeeping is a way of life for the believer because lawkeeping is not to be mere duty to earn salvation or acceptance before God. Rather, it is duty out of love and respect

for the Lawgiver and Christ's lawkeeping. But it is also privilege and blessing (1 John 5:3). Being a child of God and pleasing the Father were two great truths that John relished as expressed in 1 John 3:1-3. John knew his theology, his God, and Christ's lawkeeping.

The motivation for lawkeeping is critical. Ask yourself your motivation for obedience. Lawkeeping done out of gratitude for salvation carries with it sweetness and contentment. But lawkeeping is not a way of salvation or a way of life for the unbeliever (Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:10-13).

The Law is an external summation of the mind of God. It captures the attention of every person: the fool rejects it and the Lawgiver at his peril now and eternally. The fool becomes a law unto self and thereby competes with God. God will not share His glory with anyone (Isaiah 42:8; 48:11). The wise man embraces the Law and Christ's lawkeeping and rejoices. He imitates Christ and His lawkeeping although imperfectly and non-redemptively. The more he grows in the sweet understanding and appreciation of Jesus Christ, his Substitute and Lawkeeper, the more the believer he will imitate Him. He will use the law for the purpose it was given. The believer trusts and obeys because of who God is and out of gratitude for what the Law is and for Christ and His lawkeeping.

Application:

1. What is your view of the Law and lawkeeping?
2. Your view of the law is linked to your view of God and to your view of yourself. Is the Law your friend? Why or why not?
3. Your view of the law is tied with your understanding of such passages as Psalm 19:9-11, 99, and 105. How do you interpret these passages and how do you apply them daily?

Law: Part C The Purpose and Uses of the Law

In this series of blogs I have looked at Law as a reflection of the nature of God. I expanded the concept of Law to rules and took us back into eternity. Rules and laws govern Intratrinitarian activity toward each member of the Trinity and to mankind. It is God's nature to be a law to Himself, because He is the Lawmaker. What is proper and even natural (His nature) for God is good for mankind, because man is God's image bearer.

God's Law as spelled out in the Ten Commandments is a reflection of the nature of God. He gave us a piece of His mind! Although some may disagree, all the Ten Commandments have continued relevance into the New Testament. In fact, the Law of God is central to the Bible's message. The giving of the Law teaches us about the Triune God, the lawgiver, and Christ the great Lawkeeper. The giving of the Law helps establish the fact of a Lawgiver and the expectation of lawkeeping.

Christianity is a lawkeeping religion. But the lawkeeping demanded is perfect lawkeeping with a purpose. Unsaved sinners are unwilling and unable to bow the knee to God and His Law. They ignore God's law in some form and in its place they create their own law. They are imperfect lawmakers and lawkeepers. In marked distinction, a perfect Law from the perfect Lawgiver demands perfect lawkeeping. The Jews prided themselves on their relationship with Moses as their great lawgiver. The law came through Moses, but Jesus addressed their hard hearts when He told them that Moses wrote about Him (John 1:17; 5:45-47). They had the wrong view of God, Jesus, the Law, themselves, and lawkeeping.

Jesus Christ is the perfect Lawkeeper. The Ten Commandments give full expression to the very nature of Christ as the perfect Lawkeeper. They are an external summation of the mind of God in terms of Who He is and what He deserves and demands. The first four commandments summarize man's duty toward God. These first four commandments are summarized in Matthew 22:37-38: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.* The last six commandments summarize man's duty to man and they are summarized in Matthew 22:37:39-40: *And the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. All of the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.* Christ fulfilled the whole Law perfectly, completely, and redemptively (Luke 24:25-27).

Not only is the Law central to the Bible's message, so too is lawkeeping. Therefore, theologians have tried to summarize the uses of the Law. Scripture teaches that the law is good (Exodus 20:18-21; Romans 7:12; 1 Timothy 1:8-11). What is the law good for? Theologians speak of several uses of the Law. They include:

1. Its mirror and reflecting function: on the one hand, the Law of God reflects and mirrors the perfect righteousness of God. The law tells us much about who God is. Perhaps more importantly, the Law illumines human sinfulness, inability, and lack of desire to be God's kind of lawkeeper. The law drives mankind to grace, because it points to the true Lawkeeper. The law highlights our weakness so that we might seek the strength found in Christ (Romans. 5:20-21; Galatians 3:19). Here the law acts as a severe schoolmaster who drives us to Christ.

You look at the law and its demands and you make efforts to fulfill the law. You may even consider yourself the ultimate lawkeeper as did the rich young ruler. After failing to keep the law, you may tailor God's law to yourself and or you may create your own laws functioning as the lawmaker and keeper.

2. Its restraining function, the so-called civil function of the Law: the Law restrains evil. The law and lawkeeping cannot change human hearts. It can, however, serve to protect the righteous from the unjust. The law allows for a limited measure of peace and justice on this earth, until the last judgment is realized (Romans 13:1-7; 1Timothy 2:1-2). This function of the law demonstrates God's common grace and kindness.

3. Its lamp and revealing function: the Law reveals what is pleasing to God and increases our knowledge of sin and sinfulness. The Law for believers is a lamp and a light (Psalm 119:99, 105). The Law in its summary form enlightens believers as to what is pleasing to God. In that way, the Law is a blessing for believers as they seek to please the Triune God. The Law stimulates believers to study the Word which elaborates the fullness of the Law (Romans 7:7-12). The Christian delights in the law as God Himself delights in it. Jesus said, *If you love Me, keep My commandments* (John 14:15). Jesus highlights the highest function of the Law. It serves as an instrument for the people of God to grow in Christlikeness which is the highest function of the Law. Obedience from a changed heart and a motivation to honor and glorify the Triune God is part of resurrection life that begins at salvation.

Christianity is a law-friendly religion. How can it be otherwise? God had revealed Himself as the Lawgiver and Lawkeeper. The gospel message can be summarized as lawgiving and lawkeeping. Sadly these simple truths are so often misunderstood and or misinterpreted. Post-fall, the beauty of lawgiving and lawkeeping is summarized in two words: Jesus Christ. If you understand Jesus you understand the Law and yourself. If you rightly understand the Law, you understand Jesus and yourself.

Application:

1. Most people miss the value of the Law. Review the uses as given by theologian and write down your understanding and use of them.
2. Explain the statement: lawkeeping is alive and well. How is it true?
3. What is your understanding of Jesus' role as Lawgiver and Lawkeeper and how are those truths a blessing to you?