

# **The Law and the Gospel**



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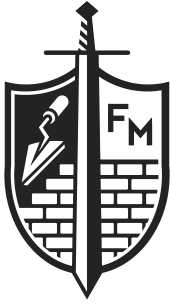
Ernest C. Reisinger

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# Foreword

THIS BOOK was originally published in 1997 during a time when Calvinistic Baptists were engaged in some fairly intense debates over the relationship between God's law and the gospel. Those debates continue, though—thankfully—in many respects, with greater clarity and charity than characterized some of those earlier exchanges.

Ernie Reisinger left this land of the dying and entered the land of the living in 2004. He was a strong proponent for the mainstream, Reformed-confessional view of the subject. As my friend, mentor, and fellow pastor he convinced me early in our friendship to see the importance of the relationship between law and gospel. Misunderstand that relationship and you will inevitably go astray in matters of sanctification and will destabilize the foundation of justification. This is what makes the study of law and gospel of crucial importance, not merely for Baptists but for anyone who wants to understand the message of the Bible.

This book is a helpful guide into what the Bible teaches concerning God's requirements of us and His provisions for us. The former is found in the law and the latter in the gospel. Both are embodied in Jesus Christ, who is full of grace and truth. To preach Christ in all of His fullness, then, one must grasp the nature of both law and grace.

John Newton wisely noted the importance of this subject: "Clearly to understand the distinction, connection and harmony between the Law and the Gospel, and their mutual subserviency to illustrate and establish each other, is a singular privilege, and a happy

means of preserving the soul from being entangled by errors on the right hand or the left.”

Many of the problems that have plagued churches historically and currently can be helpfully resolved by a clearer understanding of the law and the gospel. Both legalism and antinomianism are dispelled by the reformed, confessional teaching on this subject. Mysticism, subjectivism, and deeper (or “higher”) life theology, are likewise refuted by the teachings of this book.

Today we are hearing a growing chorus for “social justice” from conservative, Bible-believing church leaders. Many of the specific concerns raised under that umbrella are important and need to be addressed thoughtfully and redemptively. That will not happen, however, without careful regard for what God considers just. Assumptions at this point are disastrous and have led to serious divisions among brethren who otherwise agree on major biblical teachings. As this book demonstrates, God’s law reveals what is right and just. It teaches us what constitutes genuine love for our neighbor. Without a clear understanding that “love is the fulfilling of the law,” (Romans 13:10) all the attempts to encourage neighbor-love will inevitably get hijacked by unhelpful sentimentalism or someone’s personal agenda. This book cuts a straight path through all the modern confusion surrounding law and love.

Reisinger also provides help in understanding true Christian liberty. If God has forbidden something, we are not free to do it. If He has commanded something, we are not free to leave it undone. Where He has neither forbidden nor commanded, we have liberty to act according to the general principles of His Word and for His glory. Much help regarding discerning God’s will, being holy and avoiding false guilt is found at just this point.

What J. Gresham Machen said in the last century remains true today:

A new and more powerful proclamation of [the] law is perhaps the most pressing need of the hour; men would have little difficulty with the gospel if they had only learned the lesson of the

law... So it always is; a low view of law always brings legalism in religion; a high view of law makes a man a seeker after grace. Pray God that the high view may again prevail.

This book by Ernie Reisinger, on a topic that was near and dear to his heart, is a valuable aid to fight against both legalism and anti-nomianism. It helpfully and simply opens up Scriptural teaching on a widely neglected but greatly needed subject in our day.

I am grateful that, though the author is no longer with us, the truth that our Lord taught him lives on in these pages. May the biblical insights that follow bring spiritual strength to God's people and renewed devotion to the God who has given us both His law and His gospel.

Thomas Ascol  
Grace Baptist Church  
Cape Coral, Florida  
January 1, 2019



# Introduction

*“He will magnify the law and make it honorable.” (Isa. 42:21)*

Two statements made in my hearing have had a profound influence on me, giving me an insatiable desire to know the relationship between the Ten Commandments (the moral law) and the gospel of Christ. They have to do with the proper connection between law and gospel, how each is meant to serve and establish the other. (Historically our Christian fathers, as well as the great creeds and confessions of the faith, have referred to the Ten Commandments as “The moral law.” I will often do likewise.)

One statement was from an old Southern Baptist evangelist who has since gone on to his reward. He said, “The first message of the cross is the law of God.”

The other statement came from the late Professor John Murray, who related to me the following story: He was visiting his closest ministerial friend in Canada, a very reserved man who never raised his voice in the pulpit. On this particular communion Sunday, however, when the normally quiet minister came down from the pulpit to stand by the communion table, he raised his hands in ecstasy and cried out, “O Calvary, whose base is eternal justice and whose spirit is eternal love.”

After many years of seeking to understand the relationship between the law and the gospel, I have come to understand just how profound these two statements were.

As I approach the topic of the law and the gospel, the words of Elihu found in Job 32:18-19 best describe my feeling: “I am full of words; the spirit within me compels me. Indeed my belly is like wine that has no vent; it is ready to burst like new wine skins.” I have before me forty manila folders full of notes and excerpts from

many books, confessions, catechisms, and commentaries. I am indeed “ready to burst.”

I claim no original thinking for the ideas in these studies but have received help from these and other sources—some acknowledged and some not. I believe the material set forth here to be true biblical teaching. The positions expressed fall within the framework of the teaching summarized in the great historic creeds of the church, such as *The Heidelberg Catechism*, *The Westminster Confession*, and the old Baptist confession of 1689 (London Confession). There is nothing novel here, and the insights in this book may be used by others without credit.

My motives for these studies on the law and the gospel are to promote conviction of sin and misery in the conscience of the unconverted and true holiness in the heart and life of the Christian. It will be my constant endeavor to render this subject easy and intelligible to serious and devout readers. These studies are meant not for theological giraffes but for ordinary sheep in God’s flock who sincerely hunger for the truth.

My principal method will be to convince the reader’s mind, not to irritate the emotions, lest while seeking to serve grace, I promote sin, or endeavoring to lead men and women to holiness, I stir up their corruptions. I will seek to address principles, not attack persons.

It is my earnest desire that what is here plain to the eye, the God of truth will make evident to the heart—that He would give the reader sound spiritual judgment. It is also my unfeigned desire that this feeble attempt to promote true faith and holiness may obtain the approval of our matchless Redeemer, and, by His blessing, be used for the glorious cause of evangelical truth in the world.

## Law and Gospel: Distinct yet Inseparable

To blend or confound the law and the gospel has been a fatal source of error and division in the Christian church, and has embarrassed many believers not a little in their exercise of faith and practice of holiness. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, that great preacher and soul winner, said, “There is no point upon which men make greater mis-

takes than upon the relationship which exists between the law and the gospel" (*The New Park Street Pulpit* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963], 1:285). In another sermon entitled "*The Perpetuity of the Law of God*" he stated, "The man who knows the relative position of the law and the gospel has the keys of the situation in the matter of doctrine" (*The Metropolitan Tabernacle* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1971], 28:277).

There can be no true evangelical holiness, of either heart or life, unless it proceeds from faith working by love; and no true faith, of either the law or the gospel, unless the main distinction between the one and the other is spiritually discerned. The law and the gospel are set before us in the Bible as one undivided system of truth; yet an unchangeable line of distinction is drawn between them. There is also an inseparable connection and relationship between them.

Many leaders of the past have acknowledged both this distinction and relationship. J. Gresham Machen, the great Princetonian and principal founder of Westminster Theological Seminary, wrote,

A new and more powerful proclamation of that law is perhaps the most pressing need of the hour; men would have little difficulty with the gospel if they had only learned the lesson of the law...So it always is: a low view of the law always brings legalism in religion; a high view of law makes a man a seeker after grace. Pray God that the high view may again prevail. (*What Is Faith?* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1946], 141-42)

The great apostle Paul put it succinctly: "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31).

Charles Bridges has noted,

The mark of a minister "approved unto God, a work man that needeth not to be ashamed," is, that he "rightly divides the word of truth." This implies a full and direct application of the gospel to

the mass of his unconverted hearers, combined with a body of spiritual instruction to the several classes of Christians. His system will be marked by Scriptural symmetry and comprehensiveness. It will embrace the whole revelation of God, in its doctrinal instructions, experimental privileges and practical results. This revelation is divided into two parts—the Law and the Gospel—essentially distinct from each other; though so intimately connected, that no accurate knowledge of either can be obtained without the other. . . (*The Christian Ministry* [London: Banner of Truth, 1967], 222).

The law, like Christ, has always been crucified between two thieves—antinomianism on the one side and legalism on the other. The antinomian sees no relationship between the law and the gospel except that of being set free. The legalist fails to understand that vital distinction between the two.

Some preach the law instead of the gospel. Some modify them and preach neither the law nor the gospel. Some think the law is the gospel, and some think the gospel is the law; those who hold these views are not clear on either.

But others ask: Has not the law been fully abrogated by the coming of Christ into the world? Would you bring us under that heavy yoke of bondage which no one has ever been able to bear? Does not the New Testament expressly declare that we are not under the law but under grace? That Christ was made under the law to free His people from it? Is not an attempt to over-awe men's conscience by the authority of the Decalogue a legalistic imposition, altogether at variance with the Christian liberty the Savior has brought us by His obedience unto death?

We answer: Far from the law's being abolished by the coming of Christ into this world, He Himself emphatically stated, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets [or the enforcers thereof]. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will



by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Matt. 5:17-18). True, the Christian is not under the law as a covenant of works, nor as a ministration of condemnation, but he is under it as a *rule of life and an objective standard of righteousness for all people for all times.*

## Our Need for a Rule of Life

The power of a holy life needs to be accompanied by instruction in the pattern of holiness. In what does sanctified behavior consist? It consists in pleasing God. What is it that pleases God? Doing His will. Where is His will to be discerned? In His holy law. The law, then, is the Christian’s rule of life, and the believer finds that he delights in the law of God after the inward man (Rom. 7:22). The Christian is not lawless but “under the law to Christ,” a phrase from Paul that would be more accurately rendered “in the law to Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21). Sin is lawlessness, and salvation is the bringing of the lawless one into his true relation to God, within the blessedness of His holy law. The law of Moses is not other than the law of Christ; it is an objective standard just as Christ is our pattern.

The Ten Commandments were uniquely honored by God, founded in love, and they are obeyed out of affection for the One who provided redemption. A. W. Pink wrote concerning the Ten Commandments,

Their uniqueness appears first in that this revelation of God at Sinai—which was to serve for all coming ages as the grand expression of His holiness and the summation of man’s duty—was attended with such awe-inspiring phenomena that the very manner of their publication plainly showed that God Himself assigned to the Decalogue peculiar importance. The Ten Commandments were uttered by God in an audible voice, with the fearful adjuncts of clouds and darkness, thunders and lightnings and the sound of a trumpet, and they were the only parts of Divine Revelation so

spoken—none of the ceremonial or civil precepts were thus distinguished. Those Ten Words, and they alone, were written by the finger of God upon tables of stone, and they alone were deposited in the holy ark for safe keeping. Thus, in the unique honor conferred upon the Decalogue itself we may perceive its paramount importance in the Divine government (*The Ten Commandments* [Swengel, Pa.: Reiner, 1961], 5).

The moral law carries permanent validity because it is an objective standard uniquely sanctioned by God and goes straight to the root of our modern problems. It lays its finger on the church's deepest need in evangelism as well as in the Christian life: sanctification. The Ten Commandments are desperately needed not only in the church but also in society. We live in a lawless age at the end of the twentieth century. Lawlessness reigns in the home, in the church, in the school, and in the land. The Scriptures tell us that "righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

The law restrains sin. Without the moral law this world would be a field of blood, as is evidenced in places where there is no regard for God's commands. The Puritan, Samuel Bolton, in *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* ([London: Banner of Truth, 1964], 79), explained,

Blessed be God that there is this fear upon the spirits of wicked men; otherwise we could not well live in the world. One man would be a devil to another. Every man would be a Cain to his brother, an Amon to his sister, an Absalom to his father, a Saul to himself, a Judas to his master; for what one does, all men would do, were it not for a restraint upon their spirits.

Tragically, Christians have contributed to our society's moral decline by removing the Ten Commandments from their instruction.

Not only the wicked, but also followers of God need an objective, fixed, absolute standard of right and wrong. A devotional life cannot exist without regard to morality. We cannot separate devotion from duty. After all, what constitutes a devout person? Someone who is

seeking to do the will of God, someone who is instructed in sanctified behavior. And, again, in what does that behavior consist? In doing the will of God as summarized in the Ten Commandments.

The subject of these studies, law and gospel, is most important both to saints and to sinners. To know experientially the relationship between them is to “be wise unto salvation.” To live habitually in that knowledge is to be at once holy and happy. It will keep one from verging toward self-righteousness, on the one hand, and licentiousness, on the other. A clear and distinct understanding of the law and the gospel enables one to assert both the absolute freeness of sovereign grace and the sacred interests of true holiness. Without a living knowledge and an unfeigned faith of the law and the gospel, a person can neither venerate the authority of the one nor esteem the grace of the other.

## **Law and Gospel: Central to the Whole Bible**

“The law and the gospel are the principal parts of divine revelation, or rather they are the center, sum, and substance of all the other parts of it. Every passage of sacred Scripture is either law or gospel or is capable of being referred either to the one or to the other. Even the histories of the Old and New Testaments, as far as the agency of man is introduced, are but narratives of facts done in conformity or in opposition to the moral law and done in the belief or disbelief of the gospel. The ordinances of the ceremonial law, given to the ancient Israelites, were, for the most part, grafted on the second and fourth commandments of the moral law; and in their typical reference they were an obscure revelation of the gospel. The precepts of the judicial law are all reducible to commandments of the moral law, and especially to those of the second table. All threatenings, whether in the Old or New Testament, are threatenings either of the law or the gospel; and every promise is a promise either of the one or the other. Every prophecy of Scripture is a declaration of things obscure or future connected either with the law or the gospel or with both. And there is not in the Sacred Volume one admonition, reproof, or exhortation but what refers either to the law or the gospel

or both. If then a man cannot distinguish aright between the law and the gospel, he cannot rightly understand as much as a single article of divine truth. If he does not have spiritual and just apprehensions of the holy law, he cannot have spiritual and transforming discoveries of the glorious gospel; and on the other hand, if his view of the gospel is erroneous or wrong, his notions of the law cannot be right.

Besides, if the speculative knowledge that true believers themselves have of the law and the gospel is superficial and indistinct, they will often be in danger of mingling the one with the other. And this, as Luther in his commentary on Galatians well observes, “doth more mischief than man’s reason can conceive” (*A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, Martin Luther [Wigan: William Bancks, 1791], 26). If they blend the law with the gospel or, which is the same thing, works with faith, especially in the affair of justification, they will thereby obscure the glory of redeeming grace and prevent themselves from attaining “joy and peace in believing” (Rom. 15:13). They will, in a greater degree than can be conceived, retard their progress in holiness as well as in peace and comfort.

But on the contrary, if they can distinguish well between the law and the gospel, they will thereby, under the illuminating influences of the Holy Spirit, be able to discern the glory of the whole scheme of redemption, to reconcile all passages of Scripture that appear contrary to each other, to try doctrines whether they are of God, to calm their own consciences in seasons of mental trouble, and to advance resolutely in evangelical holiness and spiritual consolation” (*A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, John Colquhoun [Edinburgh: Ogle, Allardice and Thomson], 1–3).

Thus the law and the gospel are the center, the sum, and the substance of the whole Bible. How important then is it to properly relate and distinguish the two? The closer we get to a clear view of the difference between the law and the gospel and the connection between them as they serve to establish each other, the more we will understand the Holy Scriptures and thus the will and mind of God, and the more useful we will be in His service.

Charles Spurgeon, in a sermon on Romans 5:20 (*New Park Street Pulpit*, sermon 37 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan], 1:286), de-

clared,

There is no point of biblical interpretation and application where men make greater mistakes than the relationship which exists between the Law and the Gospel. ... some put Law instead of the Gospel, some modify the Law and the Gospel and therefore preach neither Law nor Gospel.

If men blend the Law with the Gospel or Faith with Works (which is the same thing), especially in the area of Justification, they will obscure the glory of redeeming grace and prevent themselves and others from having the real joy and peace in believing. They will also retard their progress in holiness.

Ah! but if men, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, are able to see the glory of the whole plan of Redemption—if they are able to reconcile the passages of Scripture which seem contrary to each other (and there are some) they would advance in true holiness and spiritual consolation.

To see the glory of the whole would be a means to calm the conscience in times of mental and spiritual trouble. You see, a troubled conscience cannot be properly quieted unless the Gospel is rightly distinguished from the Law; on the other hand, there will be no troubled conscience to be quieted without the Law.

In order, then, to help the devout reader distinguish between the law and the gospel so as to realize those inexpressibly important objectives, I shall, in humble dependence on the Spirit of truth, consider some relevant questions.

## Some Questions Before Us

1. Do those under grace have a duty to keep the Ten Commandments as a rule of life?
2. Does the gospel of Christ abrogate the Ten Commandments?
3. Does the law have any role in the work of evangelism?
4. What is the difference between the moral, the ceremonial, and the civil law?
5. What is the proper relationship between God's law and God's love?
6. What are some of the rules or principles for a right understanding of the commandments?
7. What is the relationship between Moses and Christ?
8. What is the relationship between the law and the Savior?
9. What is the relationship between the law and grace?
10. What is the gospel and its relationship to the law?

It will be proper to consider the difference between the law and the gospel as well as the agreement between them. The establishment of the law by the gospel, or the subservience of the gospel to the authority and honor of the law, will be addressed. The believer's privilege of being dead to the law as a covenant of works, and the necessary consequences will also be a topic.

I do not wish to be unduly polemical. I am more anxious to set out and establish what I conceive to be the truth than to dissect the minute and laborious details of the false. For this reason I have omitted personal references to recent advocates of other current views, except where necessary.

GOD SPOKE ALL THESE WORDS, SAYING:

*"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*

*You shall have no other gods before Me.*

*You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.*

*You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.*

*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.*

*Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.*

*You shall not murder.*

*You shall not commit adultery.*

*You shall not steal.*

*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

*You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."*

*(Ex. 20:1-17; see also Deut. 5:6-21)*





## CHAPTER ONE

---

# Values Gone Awry

*"... their foolish hearts were darkened." (Rom. 1:21)*

WE HEAR A LOT ABOUT "FAMILY VALUES": from politicians, Hollywood, talk shows, and the news media. But do people know what "family values" are, particularly with respect to moral standards?

### The Dark Side of "Family Values"

Bonnie Lynn Matthews and Elaine Kohler, recently pictured in the *Florida News-Press*, are admitted lesbians, living together, and are suing the state for taking a six-year-old child from them. They want to become foster parents. "He is our kid, we are his moms [plural]," they say. Both are mental health counselors. Kohler is an "in-home" therapist to foster children. Matthews is a therapist for emotionally disturbed and abused children. They have their own idea of "family values."

So does Murphy Brown. But her values exclude the seventh commandment. Likewise, homosexual men who marry men and want to adopt children also have "family values," but they deny any fixed, objective, absolute standard of right and wrong. And what about sports heroes who get AIDS through sexual immorality? They become heroes and are treated as role models of domestic virtue.

Woody Allen has his own version of “family values.” He made the cover of *Time* for what the magazine called his “unconventional family,” in which he had an affair with the adopted daughter of his paramour. *Time* quoted Allen as saying that he saw no moral dilemma in having an affair with Mia Farrow’s child. If having sex with Farrow is acceptable, who is to say it is wrong to have sex with Farrow’s daughter?

What sort of “family values” does the Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson, have? She was photographed topless with a man not her husband—while her children looked on. That is “family values” of the wrong kind!

In the seventh commandment, God almighty condemns such behavior regardless of what it is called. “Woe to those who call evil good; and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness” (Isa. 5:20). The Lord has given us a fixed, objective, perfect, eternal standard of right and wrong, and it does not square with just any definition of the family and its values. But our society is rapidly falling away from that standard. We may have won the cold war against communism and the short war in the Persian Gulf, but we are losing the moral war in the home, the school, and the church. Why? We no longer hold to an absolute criterion of right and wrong.

For fifty years our educational system has consciously or unconsciously been pressing for an amoral society by teaching that all morals are relative. How can any politician, Republican or Democrat, push for “family values” without a fixed, objective standard of righteousness? It is folly to think we can engender character in men and women by taking away from them their duty and responsibility to the Creator of all the earth, who will judge the world in righteousness. God has given us His definition of “family values.” They are the values summarized in the Ten Commandments.

## God Gave Them Up

Immorality is promoted not only in public schools and universities but through the entertainment media. Movies and

television romanticize macho violence and naked women. Rock concerts and rap music stir up raw lust and violence. Pornography is all over the magazine racks.

Social programs and rehab centers do some good in curtailing certain vices, but they cannot touch the root of the problem. Programs will not transform evil men and evil women into good men and good women. Why? They do not reach the heart. They are not spiritual. They do not have the right moral standard. They are disconnected from the principles and power of the Creator God.

The Bible offers this explanation of the moral crisis we are experiencing today:

Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting. . . . (Rom. 1:21–28)

Paul's words sound like a summary of the daily news. We could give them the heading, "What Happens When a Privi-

leged Society Abandons God?" The answer is found in verses 24, 26, and 28—*God abandons that society*.

- "Therefore God gave them up" (v. 24).
- "For this cause God gave them up" (v. 26).
- "God gave them over" (v. 28).

In this passage, we find mass apostasy as people turn from the worship of the invisible, true, and living God and embrace grotesque idolatry. No other Scripture addresses our present society more pointedly. Here the great apostle teaches us what happens when a privileged society such as ours abandons God. In a solemn act of judgment, God abandoned the people described in Romans 1. If He gave that sinful people over to its own corruption, should we be surprised if He sends judgment on us? Surely AIDS is the judgment of God, but it is minute compared to the judgment mentioned in verses 24, 26, and 28. God abandoned them. He did not make them sinful; He merely removed the restraints. But when God gives a society over to its own lusts and corruption, that society is under the most awesome and terrible judgment that can come upon any people, short of hell itself.

## Marks of an Abandoned Society

When a privileged society abandons God, three things emerge, all of which are very evident today: (1) There is *rampant sexual perversion*. A great deal of this passage in Romans has to do with the sexual perversions that characterized the Gentiles in Paul's day.

A few things need to be said about human sexuality: (a) Sexuality is a God-given reality. God made men and women sexual beings. (b) Sexuality is one of the strongest forces within a normal human being. It is necessary for the continuance of the human race according to God's purpose. The first command in the Bible, is to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). You cannot do that without sex. (c) Because human sexuality is God-

given, it is nothing to be ashamed of or embarrassed about when it is enjoyed within the God-given bonds of marriage. But because of the power and force of sexuality, nothing has been more corrupted and abused by sinful men and women. Whenever people have abandoned the revealed truth of God concerning sexuality, perversion and shame have been the inevitable results.

(2) A related mark of an abandoned society is *homosexuality and lesbianism*, which are clearly an abomination in the sight of God. Nevertheless, groups within our present-day society are putting forth intense efforts to make such lifestyles acceptable. There are serious efforts to change social attitudes toward homosexuality. The homosexual lobby is well organized and powerful enough to succeed in its appeals for tolerance, all the while showing intolerance of those who believe as a matter of principle that homosexuality is wrong. Christians should make their convictions known with clarity, kindness, and compassion.

(3) A third mark of an abandoned society is *social breakdown*. That is because you cannot divorce morality from true religion, which is first of all a relationship with God. In Western civilization, our laws and our way of life on the whole have arisen out of the teaching of the Bible. Many people lament the increase in crime, the decline of law and order, and the break-up of the family without recognizing that these painful realities result directly from our society's rejection of biblical morality found in the Ten Commandments. Is it not obvious that the common good and countless blessings flow from walking with God according to His commands? Imagine what it would be like if everyone obeyed the commandments; if every one loved God and his neighbor as himself; if all children obeyed their parents; if no one took the Lord's name in vain, or stole, or murdered, or committed adultery, or lied; if no one coveted his neighbor's house, his wife, or his possessions. It would be wonderful—it would be perfect—it would be heaven! The Ten Commandments are for our good as well as God's glory. But a society that abandons God's law, also abandons the blessings of His presence.

My point is not that law keeping is the way of salvation. There is only one way to be saved, and it is not by keeping the commandments but by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. But He calls all humanity to obedience. And there is a general connection between the extent to which a society as a whole obeys God's absolute moral standard and the degree to which they enjoy His blessings. There is no other true standard of right and wrong, and therefore there is no other way to live.

Even among the unconverted, the law has the positive role of restricting evil and convicting hearts so that sinners turn to Christ for salvation. Without the moral law, there is no awareness of sin. "For by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). If there is no law, there is no sin, for "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4 KJV). Paul said, "I would not have known sin, except through the law" (Rom. 7:7). The man who does not know the nature of the law cannot know the nature of sin. And he who does not know the nature of sin cannot know the nature of the Savior.

The cross makes no sense apart from the law. The cross without the law is like a jig-saw puzzle with the key piece missing. The evangelical prophet Isaiah said, "He [Christ] will magnify the law and make it honorable" (Isa. 42:21). Christ magnified the law by His perfect life and in His death on the cross.

## **Three Responses to the Law**

As we look out over our society, we can notice three kinds of response to the Ten Commandments. There are, of course, many shades of difference within these three responses, but all people will fall into these three general categories:

### ***1. Those Who Ignore and Despise the Law***

I need not say much about this group. Just look around in our society, read your newspaper, or watch your television. This group has neither the time nor the inclination to consider the law. Many people have no scruples because they have no regard

for God's law. In the past their conscience may have accused them because the law was written on their hearts; "for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them" (Rom. 2:14-15). Now their conscience excuses them. Some are already reprobate. Such people are described in Romans 1:24, 26, and 28.

## ***2. The Half-hearted Rationalizers***

The "half-hearted" are those who compromise and rationalize their violation of the Ten Commandments. This group represents the largest part of unregenerate church members. By their unholy living, they deal the most serious blow to true religion.

Having despaired of ever obtaining personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, the half-hearted have drawn up their own moral code, a less stringent line of conduct that will not offend their conscience. They have set their own standard, selecting only the commandments they consider important.

Though they would not murder, they may think nothing of breaking the ninth commandment and lying. They would not steal goods off the store shelf, but they may have no regard for the fourth commandment. Many think nothing of breaking the third commandment; they take the Lord's name in vain without blushing.

They habitually look for ways to soothe their conscience. For example, they may argue that it is simplistic to divide mankind into two classes, the righteous and the wicked. So they invent a third class, those who are not good enough for heaven and not bad enough for hell. And, of course, they place themselves in this category. Such compromise has always been, and always will be, a serious enemy of true religion.

Another tactic of these compromisers is the claim that Christianity cannot be defined. Or else they define it so broadly that it really means nothing. Always finding ways to elude, duck,

twist, and wrest the law's stern demands, they never come to see the cross and its true meaning. Unless you see the law in its true meaning, you cannot see the true meaning of the gospel.

Half-hearted compromisers often try to offset their sins and inconsistencies by formal prayers and other religious acts, such as tithing. Oh, they are not like the first group, who ignore religion. They are not openly profane. They are religious. But they have their own standard, their own moral code. The truth of the matter is that *they have their own god!* They have crafted him in their own mind. Though they will tell you that they want to do right, they also want to *decide what is right!*

One thing is certain—theirs is not the God who reveals Himself in the Bible. They have not examined themselves by His holy, just, good, and perfect law. They have never felt their misery and, therefore, never savingly felt His mercy in the person and work of His dear Son.

### ***3. Those Who Know That the Law Is Holy, Just, and Good***

The third group knows that God's holy law is good and benefits all people. They know that the law comes from an all-wise and an all-loving heavenly Father. They are disappointed and dissatisfied with themselves, not with the law.

Before his conversion, Paul may not have been a murderer, a thief, or an adulterer. Outwardly he loved and worshiped God. But, oh, that tenth commandment, "You shall not covet." He discovered that the commandments are spiritual and that they go to the heart. He learned that true religion is inward. He learned about indwelling sin (Rom. 7:7). All this was made known to him through the tenth commandment. He discovered that sin lay in his nature, not only in outward acts. The outward acts of sin are a result of an inward problem—"in me [there] dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18 kjv). It was this discovery of sin by the law that turned Paul's eyes to the law-keeping Savior, and the truth that his only hope for salvation was in the person and work of this blessed, indispensable Savior. He learned that salvation is in Christ. Thus the law was his friend. It pointed him to the cross, where that condemning law was sat-



ified for sinners. Now the bloody cross made sense to him—it was his only hope.

After his conversion, Paul could say what Augustine would later say: “With thy calling and thy shouting thou didst break my deafness, with thy flashing and shining thou didst scatter my blindness, at the scent of thee, I drew in breath and I pant for thee. I have tasted and I hunger and thirst, thou hast touched me and I am on fire for thy peace” (*Confessions* 10.27.28).

Those who glory in the law can say with Paul after his conversion, “I delight in the law of God according to the inward man” (Rom. 7:22). They can exclaim with David, “O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97 kjv). They can prove the words of Joshua, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth; but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Josh. 1:8). I pray that you, my dear reader, are found in this third group of people.

As you face our Creator’s holy, just, and good law, you have one of three alternatives:

1. Apostasy: Turning away from God and religion; total desertion of the principles of the faith.
2. Hypocrisy: Picking, choosing, and rationalizing; the way of the large majority of modern-day church members. They have their own law and their own god, but not the God of the Ten Commandments.
3. Sainthood: Feeling guilt and misery by the law, and therefore finding grace and mercy at the cross. There is mercy with the Lord.

Do you see the folly of thinking that we can develop character in men, women, and children by taking away their responsibility to their Creator and their fellowmen? To violate moral standards while acknowledging their authority is one thing; to lose all sense of their moral claim and to repudiate all moral authority is something far more serious and threatening.

We must disagree sharply with those liberal theologians—whether Catholic, Jew, or Protestant—who hold that our contemporary society is evolving to a “new morality” based on “love” for others rather than on the fixed, absolute, objective standards of righteousness set out in the Ten Commandments. The contemporary scene shows in fact a rejection of all moral restraints in favor of a self-indulgent quest for pleasure. Far from evolving to a higher morality, people are simply interested in getting their “kicks,” by whatever means.

The distinction between right and wrong, good and evil, decent and indecent has not merely collapsed but become irrelevant. The trend toward regarding truth as relative and conditional, rather than absolute and eternal, reaches its logical conclusion in lawlessness. What can we expect when long ago the Ten Commandments were expelled from our public schools, many of our homes, and even our churches? No human ethic is possible unless it is grounded in the great Creator and His moral mandates to all creatures.

I WANT TO END THIS CHAPTER with a word of encouragement. Romans 1 is a vivid picture of our current moral climate. It is sad and depressing. But in contrast to this dark, gloomy moral forecast, I want to sound a strong note of hope.

Some of us have loved ones and friends who are caught up in the immoral lifestyles we have been talking about. There is hope for them in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. *And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God.*

It may seem odd to say that there is hope in a passage that begins with the judgment of God against lawbreakers. Yet Paul continues, "And such *were* some of you." Then comes one of the most encouraging, wonderful words in all the Bible, mentioned three times in verse 11—"But." The message is that the unrighteous can be changed: "But you were washed, *but* you were sanctified, *but* you were justified." And therein lies the hope for lawbreakers. *There is hope*—as long as someone is willing to proclaim the law and the gospel.