

BEGIN HERE

THE LAW OF GOD AND PUBLIC POLICY: PART 1



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Begin Here

Begin Here
The Law of God and Public Policy: Part 1
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Welcome to *Begin Here*

It's no secret that public policy in America is in a state of crisis. Tribalism, a sense of entitlement, an increasing ignorance of our history, and the continued drift of churches from their Biblical roots have all combined to sow confusion into moral, social, and cultural matters, and especially as these take the form of laws and public policy.

What is the Christian's role in this situation? To just turn away, circle the wagons, and let the world go to hell in a handbasket?

Not according to Scripture. The Church must recover its sense of obligation to the larger society, and to do this it must recover a proper understanding use of the Law of God. In this series, we'll see why this matters so much as consider the role of Biblical Law in shaping how we approach matters of public policy.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 A Good Law for All

“Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”
Deuteronomy 4.5, 6

A Law for a new world

Peruse the civil codes of the American colonies and you will discover a curious phenomenon. Frequently, colonial legislators drafted their civil codes by looking to the Old Testament Law of God. Whereas English common law was unwritten, in the American colonies, there not being as ready a supply of judges and barristers as in England, it became necessary to reduce law to codes anyone could read, understand, and follow. It is not hard, for example, to discern the Biblical basis for the following colonial statutes:

Pennsylvania, April 25, 1662: That all marriages, not forbidden by the law of God...shall be encouraged.

That all treasurers, judges, masters of the rolls, sheriffs, justices of the peace...whatsoever relating to courts or trials of causes...shall be such as possess faith in Jesus Christ and that are not convicted of ill fame...¹

Virginia, 1631/32: Whereas... all swearing, cursing, and profaning God’s holy name is forbidden by the Word of God, be it enacted by the Majesty’s Lieutenant Governor, Council and Burgesses of this present General Assembly and the authority thereof it is hereby enacted that no person or persons whatsoever shall from henceforth, swear, curse, or profane God’s holy name.

And forasmuch as nothing is more acceptable to God than the true and sincere service and worship of Him according to His holy will, and that the holy keeping of the Lord’s day is a principal part of the true service of God...be it enacted...that there shall be no meetings, assemblies, or concourse of people out of their parishes on the Lord’s day, and that no person or persons whatsoever shall travel upon the said day, and that no other thing or matter whatsoever be one on that day which tends to the profanation of the same, but that the same be kept holy in all respects...²

These examples are typical of many others. Up and down the eastern seaboard, in the civil codes of every colony, the Law of God is a source and even sometimes the substance—copied verbatim—describing how colonies were to be governed. We may balk at such blatant attempts to enforce morality, but what they show us is that colonial lawmakers, desiring to make this new world a *good* world, looked to the Law of God to define civil order and help ensure the safety and wellbeing of all citizens.

Since that Law served to lay the foundation of this great Republic, why should we now regard it as no longer to be relied upon or even referred to in matters of public policy?

A Law for all time

If our forebears and founders believed that benefit could be gained from a proper understanding and use of Biblical law, should we not also expect to find such benefit for ourselves and our posterity?

The Law of God expresses the character of God and outlines His holy and righteous and good purposes for humankind (Rom 3.31; 7.12). As we see in our text, on the eve of Israel’s conquest of the promised land, God

¹*Foundations of Colonial America, Vol. 2, Part 1* (New York: Chelsea House, 1983), p. 1146.

²*Foundations of Colonial America*, pp. 2078, 2079.

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was already pointing to the day when the nations would admire His people because of the wisdom and understanding Israel would evidence in her obedience to the Law of God. The prophets Isaiah and Micah foresaw a day when the Law of God would be spread about among the nations, and those nations would eagerly stream up to the mountain of the Lord's house to learn what they could about this wise and understanding way of life (Is. 2.1-3; Mic. 4.1-5).

Since God's Law is good and He has instituted governments for good (Rom. 7.12; 13.1-4), it follows that the Law of God should be a useful resource for people to enjoy lives of safety and goodness. The Christian should expect that, as people enjoy the goodness marked out by the Law of God, they might be induced by the wisdom and understanding they see in that Law to "stream up" to the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Mountain and Temple of salvation for all who seek Him (Jn. 2.18-21; 3.16).

A Law for all nations

One of the uses of the Law of God, explained by the prophets and apostles, is to inform the policies of public officials and the governments they represent (cf. Dan. 4.27; Matt. 14.1-4; Acts 23.1-3). Wisdom for governing is to be discovered in the Law of God, quite apart from any of its "religious" import. Obedience to God's Law does not bring salvation; however, according to the Scriptures, following the Law of God lines up with the favor of God. Nations whose policies promote obedience to the Law of God can expect to realize more of His grace, whereas those that deny, neglect, or reject God and His Law are headed for disintegration.

The Law of God is thus a valuable resource for questions of ethics and public policy. But how shall the nations, how shall *our* nation, which is becoming increasingly indifferent and even hostile to matters of faith and religion, be able to know the favor of God which comes from obedience to His Law?

The calling of the followers of Christ is to embody and proclaim the Kingdom of God, by living holy lives and calling all people in every place to repent and believe the Gospel. We should aspire to realize as much of God's Kingdom as we can, advancing in it day by day. Jesus clearly taught that Kingdom greatness depends on obedience to God's Law (Matt. 5.17-19). While the Law of God can be difficult to understand, and while changing times and circumstances require great care in how the Law is interpreted and applied, still, the ageless wisdom of God is encoded there, wisdom that can be of help in promoting civic order and national wellbeing, even in a secular age such as ours.

The Law of God is a good Law for all. He has entrusted its use to His people, and He calls us to work *out* our salvation—not *for* it—by hearing, obeying, and teaching the Law of God.

For reflection

1. How would you describe your attitude toward and use of the Law of God at this time?
2. Can you think of any ways the Law of God continues to provide safety and blessing for our society?
3. Do you think it's possible that God's holy and righteous and good Law could once again have great influence in our society? If so, how would that happen?

Next steps—Preparation: Spend an extended time praying through the Ten Commandments (Deut. 5.6-21). Pray slowly. Ask the Lord to suggest situations in our nation and in your community where we need this Law's wisdom.

2 The Spirit of the Law

“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live... And you will again obey the voice of the LORD and do all His commandments which I command you today.” Deuteronomy 30.6, 8

Law for an age of grace

From the beginning, God intended His Law as a standard of wisdom, righteousness, and justice for all nations, although He gave it first to His people, that they might embrace and embody it before the world (cf. Deut. 4.5-8). In its original form and context, the Law of God was altogether appropriate for the times in which it was given. Especially was it appropriate for a people who did not have a heart for God and who needed to have their most sinful passions and tendencies reined in by rigid strictures of threat and discipline (cf. Deut. 5.29). Israel’s persistent failure to obey God’s Law ultimately cost them their freedom, as they were taken captive by the very cultures they chose to emulate.

But Israel’s condition of hardness would not always be the case. God explained to the people of Moses’ generation that a day was coming when He would cleanse the hearts of His people and enable them to obey His Law. Subsequent revelation explains that this day would come with the outpouring of the Spirit of God upon His people (cf. Ezek. 36.26, 27). When God gives a new Spirit to His people, then they will understand and keep His Law. The coming of the Spirit of God brought the Kingdom of God to the world in a new and more intimate way. Greatness in that Kingdom is associated with learning, obeying, and teaching the Law of God (Matt. 5.17-19).

We now live in an age of grace, when, by the striving and wooing of God’s Spirit and the preaching of the Gospel, many are led to seek a heart for God and a right relationship with Him. This He has provided through the salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ. All who, by the inward working of God’s Spirit, receive a new heart, are enabled to believe in Jesus and enter His Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18).

And with this new heart comes a new desire to learn, obey, and teach the Law of God as a means of grace to the world.

The expansion of God’s Israel

In this new era of the Kingdom of God, the Spirit—and, with Him, the Law of God—is extended to Gentiles and Jews alike (Mic. 4.1-5; cf. Acts 15.8-21). Thus, as the Gospel comes to the Gentiles, through the holy lives and faithful witness of God’s people, the benefits of God’s Law break loose from their ancient moorings into new cultures and among new peoples, where the wisdom and understanding of the Law come to light in new ways by the illuminating and enabling power of the Spirit of God.

We can see this pattern already beginning to be employed in Israel’s own history. In Ruth 4 a situation arose which was not expressly covered by any of the statutes of God’s Law. It fell to the judges and elders to consider the *words* of the Law in order to discern the *spirit* in which it should be applied for the *specific circumstances* of their day. Their deliberations and decision received the blessing of God.

We expect that, in this age of the Spirit, when all nations are commanded to believe the Gospel, that there should be some adjustments in the way we understand, practice, and administer the Law of God. This is so (a) because the Law does not always speak *specifically*, that is, *in its words*, to the unique social and cultural circumstances of our day; (b) the Church—the expanded and fulfilled Israel (Heb. 12.22-24)—is not the state and does not possess the powers God has reserved to the state for doing good (Rom. 13.1-4); and (c) grace and forgiveness are extended to all peoples through the message of the Gospel, not by calling them to keep

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the Law.

Because America is not ancient Israel, and America exists during the era of God's Kingdom, we do not expect to apply God's Law in every case exactly as it was given to Moses. Apostolic example shows us that the *spirit* of the Law inclines toward grace rather than retribution (1 Cor. 5; cf. Deut. 22.30; 2 Cor. 3.6). The *letter* or *words* of the Law remain the starting point for *defining and exposing* sin, but the grace of the Spirit and the Gospel must now guide us in determining the *application of the Law* to the needs and circumstances of our day.

But all this interpreting and applying God's Law in ways relevant to our contemporary condition must begin in the hearts of believers and their churches. Unless we are a *people* of the Law who are creating a new *community* of grace, we will not have the wisdom God promised that can attract people to Himself. The Law we learn and live will convict us of sin, drive us to Jesus for forgiveness, and open to us the power of the Spirit that we might live in the holiness, righteousness, and goodness God's Law provides, loving God and our neighbors as the defining attributes of our lives and communities.

The Church is not the state any more than American is Israel or the Church. But the Church is the new and being-completed Israel, and the Law God has given for His people remains relevant for us and our times today.

The spirit of the Law

And since, in every nation, making and administering law is in the hands of government, and governments are not populated exclusively by believers, the people of God, out of love for God and their neighbors, must discover ways of commending obedience to the *spirit* of the Law, to shape public policy in ways that government, as the servant of God for good, can ultimately embrace.

This we do by *performing* the requirements of God's Law, not in some artificial or superficial manner, but from the heart, gladly obeying what we know to be God's will; and by *persuading* public officials of the benefits of grace to be realized by bringing the spirit of God's Law to bear on matters of public policy.

We understand that the Law of God is not the means of salvation; yet it is a good law for all nations. We look to the Spirit and the Gospel to help us in being wise as serpents and harmless as doves in bringing the holiness, righteousness, and goodness of God's Law to bear in appropriate ways, first, on our lives as members of the community of the King of kings, and then on the public policy concerns of our day.

For reflection

1. Since the Church is the new Israel, it only makes sense that God's Law should be its possession and treasure. Explain.

2. Jesus and the apostles appealed to the Law of God to guide believers in the way of love. What should we learn from this about the role of the Law in our sanctification?

3. We're not saved *by* the Law but *unto* it. Explain.

Next steps—Conversation: How do your fellow believers make use of the Law of God in their walk with Jesus? Ask a few of them. See what you can learn to improve your own use of the Law.

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“Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”
Deuteronomy 4.5, 6

The Law is good

From its inception, the Law of God was meant to bring the good blessings of God—His wisdom, mercy, justice, and love—into the experience of the nations of the world. Although it was never intended as a means of salvation, it is a powerful agent through which the grace of God flows to the world.

The Law remains a valuable resource today, as even many contemporary laws and statutes reflect. However, associational, cultural, and spiritual conditions having changed, certain aspects of how we apply the Law of God will differ in our day from how they were applied in ancient Israel. The Law is good, but we need to understand it in ways that fit the times in which we live.

But we also need to make sure that our efforts to apply God’s Law in the realm of public policy begin where God originally intended, with those who call upon Him as God and Lord. As the Law works its gracious effects in our lives and communities, the surrounding world will be drawn to it and, at least for many, drawn to Him Who gave it.

To bless the nations

God’s covenant promise to bless all nations (Gen. 12.1-3) is mediated through those who know, love, and serve Him. We are the agents of God’s grace to the world. As we, by our words and deeds, spread God’s grace to others, praise and thanks to God increase, and He is glorified (2 Cor. 4.15). And *performing* the Law of God in our lives and communities is a primary means whereby the grace of God reaches others.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we cannot hope to *persuade* others to embrace policies shaped by Biblical principles of justice and goodness we neither understand nor embody. Only by learning and keeping the Law of God, consistent with the teaching of the whole Bible, will we be able to have a credible platform from which to shape public policy according to the promised blessings of God.

The way governments and peoples will be drawn to seek God’s Law is by observing the wisdom and understanding which can be gained there (Deut. 4.5-8; Mic. 4.1-5). As believers go among and converse with our unbelieving neighbors, as we work with them, and share in community life together, the hope we have in Jesus Christ, which we live in obedience to God’s Law, will provoke many to want the benefits of such wisdom and understanding for their own lives (1 Pet. 3.15; Mic. 4.1-5).

Translated into the public arena, policy-makers will be much more inclined to consider statutes based in or reflective of the spirit of God’s Law as they see the benefits to society of following such a course. Lawmakers already know that society benefits when honesty and fairness define the terms of commerce and trade, when private property is safeguarded, people’s lives are protected against violence, and the poor are helped and cared for in positive and constructive ways. But such practices exist in American public policy today because, as we have seen, they were inscribed there from the beginning or subsequently adopted by men and women who lived them as a reflection of their understanding of the spirit of God’s Law.

For the Law of God thus to attract people—leading them to understand and embrace ideas of goodness, justice, and wisdom consistent with the mind and will of God—it will be essential that Christians live and teach the Law as dutiful citizens of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5.17-19; 1 Jn. 2.1-6). Peter says if we suffer as

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believers because we live holy lives, then this is a reason to glorify God (1 Pet. 4.12-16). But how shall believers be made fit for such lives? Peter responds “the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God” (v. 17).

From the house of God

I am not unaware that this passage is usually translated “at” or “with” the house or household of God. But the preposition is ἀπό, *apo*—“from”, or “by means of”, not “at” or “with.” The work of bringing God’s holy and righteous and good Law to men and nations begins *from* the household of God, *within* it, *among* its members, where the followers of Jesus Christ are diligent in learning, obeying, and teaching the Law of God, *in the first instance*, among themselves. When all our daily judgments—choices, decisions, actions—line up with the judgment of God’s Law, then we will be in a position to show the wisdom of God to our world.

In the Kingdom of God good works are no less a part of our mission than good words. Believers have been redeemed for good works (Eph. 2.8-10); we are not to grow weary in seeking to perform good works (Gal. 6.1-10); indeed, we are to be very zealous to learn and do every good work (Tit. 3.1, 8, 14). By our good works we draw attention to our good God and cause others to discover their own sins and to seek the favor of the Lord. And our good works are defined, in the first place, by the holy and righteous and good Law of God, ordained from of old (Rom. 7.12; Eph. 2.10).

It is thus crucial that we and our churches take up the task of learning and living according to the Law of God, not as a way of *becoming* saved, but as a way of *being* saved, of knowing and enjoying the benefits of God’s promises, of increasing in love for Him and our neighbors, and of showing His wisdom to the world.

There is no excuse for churches ignoring, minimizing, neglecting, or otherwise failing to treat the Law of God with the reverence and respect it demands. It is time for judgment, which is only the application of God’s Law to every aspect of human life, to begin *from within* the household of faith. As we learn, live, and teach the Law among ourselves, *performing* all the Law requires, we will be better able to *persuade* our unbelieving neighbors, and the governments that rule us, to incorporate the *spirit* of God’s Law in their public policies.

For reflection

1. What can you do to bring more focus on performing God’s Law into your walk with the Lord?
2. What role does the Law of God play in the life of your church?
3. What can we expect if we continue to neglect the holy and righteous and good Law of God?

Next steps—Transformation: What will you begin to do to make learning and performing the Law of God a more central aspect of your walk with and work for Him?

4 Through the Church for the World

*“The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes;
And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”* Genesis 49:10

The challenge of God’s Law

If the Law of God is ever going to have renewed influence on the shape of public policy, it must first begin to bear fruit within the community of faith. If we who believe in Jesus Christ will not walk the path that He walked, we have no right to expect others to do so (1 Jn. 2:1-6).

On the other hand, if, through our embrace of and obedience to the Law of God, we are able to show the benefits of such obedience to the world, it may be enough to convince even those outside the family of faith that the Law of God is a reliable source for sound public policy.

We do not look to the Law of God for salvation; that comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. But, like the founders of our republic, we understand that there is great wisdom to be gained from following the teachings of God’s Law, and much good to contribute to the social order. And our nation knows this implicitly, albeit perhaps unconsciously, since it is a fact that many statutes remaining in the American legal system have their roots in the wisdom and goodness of the Law of God.

The challenge for believers today is how to understand the Law of God, and to apply it in own communities, so that we may then bring the Law to bear on public policy in a way that causes the blessings of God to flow even to those who do not know Him.

God’s King and His Kingdom

Our text from Genesis 49 helps us in understanding God’s intention for His Law, that it should come to the world through the obedience of His own people, as they submit to His eternal King.

Jacob foresaw an era during which kings would rule over the people of Israel, all the kings descended from the tribe of Judah. The final king in the dynasty is known as “Shiloh.” When “Shiloh” comes—Him for Whom the Kingdom has been prepared—in His glory, then the dynasty entrusted to Judah will cease and the nations and peoples of the world will be led to obey God’s King.

That King has come; He has brought near His Kingdom; and His Spirit is at work in the world advancing His rule of righteousness, peace, and joy like a growing stone (Rom. 14:17, 18; Dan. 2:44, 45). God intends to draw the nations to obedience to Jesus Christ through the example and witness of His people, as we have seen. And, while we do not expect the world to be entirely converted to Christ, nor the Kingdom of God to come fully before the day of judgment (Dan. 7:18-27; Matt. 13:36-43), still, we expect and work for progress in that domain, praying that God will do in and through us all that He has prepared from of old (Matt. 6:10; Eph. 2:10).

Government and the challenge of the good

In this world God has established governments to serve people for good (Rom. 13:4). But governments need wisdom and understanding to know what is good. The Law of God is good (Rom. 7:12), and the people of God are called to demonstrate wisdom and understanding by obeying God’s Law, and to teach God’s goodness and wisdom so that others might gain as much of the benefit of God’s favor as is possible—up to and including salvation in Jesus Christ. For it is a primary function of the Law of God to expose people’s sins and point them to Jesus.

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All this is just another way of saying that the Church is the focal point of God's world-transforming agenda, the epicenter of His power for making all things new and reconciling the world unto Himself.

The Church does not bear the political sword. It bears only the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. The Word of God, with the Law as its cornerstone, instructs us in the way of obedience and blessing, and reveals the wisdom and understanding of God which are to be found in their fullness in Jesus Christ. The grace of God flows through Jesus Christ in wave upon wave *from* the Church and *to* the world *through* the lives of God's people as they live out the commands and promises of God's Word.

The power of persuasion

Thus, the only power by which the Church wields to bring the benefits of God's Law to its unbelieving neighbors and their governments is the power of *persuasion*. The challenge to each generation of believers, as we strive to bring holiness to completion in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7.1), is to discern the best ways of persuading our contemporaries in the direction of obedience and blessing. These will not be the same in every age or culture or political environment, and the task will never be easy.

We are not alone in this effort: The Word and Spirit of God are lively and powerful to bring the benefits of God even to those who despise Him (Jn. 6.63; Heb. 4.12; Matt. 5.43-48). The power of persuasion is not simply a matter of convincing others by arguments. Much less is it *merely* a political activity. Persuasion is accomplished when, by a combination of compelling reasons and examples, policies may be prescribed, the wisdom and understanding of which are readily apparent to those who must enact them.

As the focal point and epicenter of God's Kingdom, it is the Church's duty to *persuade* its generation to seek the wisdom and understanding of God as this is revealed in His Law, and, beyond these, to seek the King of that Law for salvation. For Shiloh has come, and He is ruling the world for love through the statutes, precepts, judgments, and commandments of His Law and all His Word.

For reflection

1. What would happen if Christians simply decided that governments could do whatever they wanted, without any constraint of Biblical Law?
2. Why do we emphasize the need to be *keepers* of God's Law before we try to persuade others of its benefits?
3. What can you do to improve in learning and obeying God's Law?

Next steps—Transformation: Spend some time in prayer thanking God for all the laws you can think of that have been influenced or shaped by the Law of God.

5 The Law beyond the Letter

“If men contend with each other, and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist, and he does not die but is confined to his bed, if he rises again and walks about outside with his staff, then he who struck him shall be acquitted. He shall only pay for the loss of his time, and shall provide for him to be thoroughly healed.” Exodus 21.18, 19

Maintaining the balance of justice

The Law of God describes a system of justice designed to maintain the balance of neighbor-love within the communities of ancient Israel. Surrounding nations, God promised, would see the wisdom and justice of keeping God’s Law, and they would desire to realize such benefits for themselves. The words of the civil codes of God’s Law are neither salvific nor exhaustive; they are, rather, designed to illustrate applications of the Ten Commandments in various situations, so that local judges and authorities could *reason* based on the *words* of the Law concerning what the *spirit* of the Law required in any situation.

In the American legal system, those who are found to have caused injury to others can expect that they or their insurance company will be liable for compensatory payments. This is as it should be to restore the balance of, if not neighbor-love, at least of justice, and to discourage the use of violence against one’s neighbor. Such an approach to justice did not originate with American or English law.

In the incident described in the text above, justice would be achieved when the wounded party was restored to health, including payment of opportunity costs to cover his expenses and lost income while recuperating.

The Law of God thus encouraged the people of Israel to check their anger and to eschew violence toward their neighbors. When they failed in this, justice required retribution.

The spirit beyond the words

As Christians, we want to realize the benefits of justice and neighbor-love, as these are revealed in the Law of God, for our own communities and nation. We must, therefore, work hard to understand the concept of justice as this is revealed in God’s Law and the rest of His Word.

But we must not suppose that we are to be bound merely by the *letter* or *words* of the Law. In this age when God has poured out His Spirit—Who is the Giver of God’s Law (Lk. 11.20; Matt. 12.28; Ex. 31.18; Deut. 9.10) and both its Teacher (Ezek. 36.26, 27) and its Power (Ezek. 36.26, 27; Phil. 2.13)—believers must look to the Spirit of God to help them discern the *spirit* of His Law. Thus we will be better prepared to work for bringing neighbor-love and justice to our communities and our nation.

As believers grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as we learn to walk in the Spirit rather than in the flesh (2 Pet. 3.18; Gal. 5.16-23), we will discover applications of the Law of God that exceed the letter of the Law and bring renewing and liberating power for reconciliation and justice into our daily practice of the faith. The Law will not save anyone; but the Law can be a source of such benefits as peace, mutual respect, and justice wherever its tenets are observed.

The story of the good Samaritan illustrates this well (Lk. 10.25-37). Here Jesus provides a lesson in how to restore justice and neighbor-love by following the spirit and not just the letter of the Law of God.

The good Samaritan

A man had been beaten. He was wounded and unable to care for himself. Justice demanded that he be restored to health and that those responsible be made to cover his expenses, as well as restore what they had stolen from him. Any first-year law student in any American university would see the justice in this.

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But it was not likely that those who perpetrated violence against this man would ever be discovered. Would justice languish and neighbor-love fail? Hardly. Jesus showed how a Samaritan—the least likely of people to care for a wounded Jew—took it upon himself, without need of law or other compulsion, to restore justice on behalf of the wounded man. He did not owe the man anything. The priest and Levite who crossed the road and refused to help the wounded man doubtless considered that this was not their problem; they did not commit the crime, so they owed the man nothing in the way of help. They could persuade themselves, perhaps, that they were only following the *letter* of the Law.

But the Samaritan understood the larger demands of justice—Samaritans knew and kept the Torah—and was willing to sacrifice his own convenience and material bounty so that the higher and greater demand of justice and neighbor-love might be fulfilled. He did what was in his power to do, given the circumstances before him. Jesus commands His followers to practice obedience to His Law in just this same way (v. 37).

Christians and public policy

The Law of God demands justice; at the same time, it guides us in the practice of mercy, generosity, compassion, and selflessness. We are practicing the *spirit* of the Law when its *words* lead us to show such neighbor-love to the people around us.

Christians take up the Law of God as a holy and righteous and good standard for following Jesus in bringing justice and neighbor-love to their communities (Rom. 7.12; 1 Jn. 2.1-6). We do not require acts of Congress or local commissions to move us to follow the Spirit of God as He teaches and empowers us to live out the spirit of God's Law. Jesus expects all His followers to be like the good Samaritan and to “go the extra mile” of loving our neighbors as ourselves. His Law is that standard to which we must turn in doing so.

At the same time, Christians recognize that just public policy requires strictures and sanctions; not all people in our community have the Spirit of Christ. If the goodness and benefits of God's Law are to extend to all the members of our community, that servant for good which God has appointed (Rom. 13.1-5) will need to draw on God's Law to help in determining which policies are most likely to maintain the balance of justice and neighbor-love in the community.

The duty of the Christian community is to *show* the way to justice and neighbor-love within our own communities, and to *work* for public policies that will mirror the words *and* spirit of the Law of God. Especially in a democratic society such as ours, this is an essential part of what believers owe to government and our neighbors.

For reflection

1. What do we learn from the parable of the Good Samaritan about the relationship between God's Law and loving our neighbors?
2. If the outcome of keeping God's Law is not love for God and neighbors, have we truly understood and kept the Law?
3. Can government at any level fulfill its God-given calling apart from (at least the *spirit* of) the Law of God? Explain.

Next steps—Preparation: What is your approach to improving your understanding of God's Law?

6 Two Astonishing Promises

“For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?” Deuteronomy 4.7, 8

Hope embodied

The Christian understands that the chief end of every human life is realized in knowing God and living for His glory. This is that full and abundant life—eternal life—which Jesus accomplished and, by His Word and Spirit, bestows freely on all who believe in Him (Jn. 14.6; 17.3).

Believers are called to live as Jesus did—learning, doing, and teaching the Law of God, and all the Word of God, as the definition and outworking of our citizenship in the Kingdom of God (1 Jn. 2.1-6; Matt. 5.17-19). We are citizens of a new realm—the Kingdom of God’s own dear Son (Col. 1.13). We are indwelt by a new Spirit, the Spirit of the living God (Jn. 14.15-17). We understand and approach the world, not with the mindset of the times, but with the mind of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 2.16). As Christians walk in the Spirit, Who gave and teaches the Law (Ezek. 36.26, 27), we discover new depths of love for God and neighbor which the Law defines and the Spirit empowers (Matt. 22.34-40; Gal. 5.22).

This is why it is so important that, before Christians think to bring the Law of God into the public square, we must be *practiced* in that Law—the spirit, not just the letter of it—as the embodiment of all our hope. Unless we can point to the benefits that come from obedience to God’s Law within our own communities, we will be hard pressed to persuade our unbelieving neighbors that such can be true for them as well.

Our hope in so living is that by our good works, works outlined in the Law of God (Eph. 2.10; Rom. 7.12), we will bring glory to God (Matt. 5.13-16). In everything we do, the glory of God must be our pre-eminent concern (1 Cor. 10.31). God is working to make His glory known throughout the world, so that people might be drawn to His beauty, goodness, and truth, and find in Him the way of full and abundant life (Hab. 2.14; Mic. 4.1-5; Jn. 14.6).

When our neighbors, seeing our hope, approach us to ask about the wisdom, understanding, and hope they observe in us, then we must glorify God by explaining what He has done for us through the work of His Son, our Lord and King Jesus Christ. Thus is God glorified in our witness, lived and spoken.

The more we live this way, the more we can influence the shape of public policy.

Feigned obedience

In Psalm 81.13-16 God explains how the obedience of His people brings Him glory even from His enemies: “Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways!” Here is our most basic calling as citizens of the Kingdom of God’s Son and the people of God through Jesus Christ: We are called to hear and obey His Word, beginning with His Law. We cannot expect the benefits of God’s Law to flow through us to the surrounding world unless we are committed to reading, meditating in, and studying the Law of God.

Then follows two astonishing promises: “I would soon subdue their enemies and turn My hand against their adversaries.” This we may understand, in the first instance, as a reference to the spiritual warfare in which Christians are continually engaged. As we live in obedience to God’s Law, we may expect to gain ground against the enemy of our souls, even as Jesus did, by falling back on the Law to resist the devil (Matt. 4.1-11).

But there is more: “Those who hate the LORD would pretend obedience to Him, but their fate would endure forever.” An earlier version of the NASB is more accurate here: The enemies of the Lord would “feign

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obedience” to Him—just as, in many ways, they do this day.

Unbelievers may hate God, but they are happy to have the State protect them against thieves, slanderers, libelers, and murderers. They emboss Moses on the front of their Supreme Court building, acknowledging, at the very least, their need of the last six of the Lord’s Ten Commandments. Those who do not believe in God or His Son nevertheless seek the benefits that come from obedience to His Law. They may not like to be reminded of this, and may, indeed, insist that such precepts and statutes are only “common sense” or the product of evolutionary trial and error. All the same, they cannot disagree that conforming their behavior to aspects of the Law of God is the way to a just society.

The more God’s people are faithful in knowing and living the Law of God, the greater will be the “feigned obedience” of those who have no regard for the Lord or His will. Such “feigned obedience” does not save those who thus “keep” the Law of God; their divinely-appointed fate is yet upon them and will “last forever.” However, such obedience does honor God by bringing a modicum of justice and neighbor-love to society.

“But He would satisfy you with the finest of wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.” God’s people will want for no good thing as we follow the path of obedience to His Law. And the more consistent we are in obeying the Law, and the more we live in the love of Jesus Christ, the more we will be able to bring the benefits of obedience—even feigned obedience—to our communities.

Believers have the duty of making known the glory of God by reminding our neighbors of where justice, wisdom, understanding, and goodness have their origin (Hab. 2.14; Rom. 7.12). Moreover, we must work, by the Law of God and all the means of persuasion, to bring more such blessings to our communities, in ways appropriate to the spiritual and policy needs of the day and the readiness of the community to submit to the wisdom and understanding of God.

Christians must be exemplary in conduct, informed regarding the issues, and wise in promoting public policies that line up with the holy and righteous and good counsel of the eternal Law of God. If we will do so, God’s astonishing promises well begin to be realized in our midst.

For reflection

1. What are the two astonishing promises God holds out to His people?
2. What are the conditions for realizing those promises?
3. What does this teach us about the place of God’s Law within the believing community?

Next steps—Preparation: How many different ways can you identify the promise of “feigned obedience” already at work in our society?

7 Seeking the Peace

“Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”
Deuteronomy 4.5, 6

Seeking the peace

It should be obvious by now that Christians have a responsibility to shape public policy according to the wisdom and understanding of the Law of God.

Nations deserve good governments (Rom. 13.1-5), and good governments require wisdom and understanding so that rulers may make and administer just laws in every area of society. The Law of God is good, as we have seen (Rom. 7.12); so we are not surprised to discover that not only our forebears but our contemporaries—whether or not they are aware of it or would agree—look to the Law of God to shape aspects of American legal practice and public policy.

But there is always room to improve justice and neighbor-love in ways consistent with the teaching of God’s Law. Christians are called to show by their lives—individually and as communities—the beauty, wisdom, and goodness of the Law of God, going beyond the letter of the Law to the breathtaking newness of its Spirit, thereby demonstrating the love, mercy, and justice of God’s Law in ways that cause our neighbors to wonder.

But beyond living out the holy and righteous and good requirements of God’s Law (Rom. 7.12; 3.31), Christians must seek to shape public policy in the direction of God’s *shalom* (Jer. 29.7; 1 Tim. 2.1-8). Christians know the peace of God as the fruit of His Spirit which passes all understanding (Gal. 5.22, 23; Phil. 4.6, 7). We are citizens of a Kingdom in which peace is the gift and possession of all (Rom. 14.17, 18). And we are called to live at peace with all men (Rom. 12.18) and to seek the peace and wellbeing of the nations to which God has sent us.

This we do in three ways, first, and most importantly, by our prayers and lives.

In addition, like Joseph and Daniel and countless others, Christians must be prepared to seek the peace of God for our neighbors by taking part in the actual work of government. We must be willing to serve in the political or governmental arena as opportunity allows or necessity requires, seeing this as a calling from God to extend the righteousness, peace, and joy of His Kingdom through the instruments of civil government.

Finally, Christians seek the peace of our communities and nation by working to influence and shape the policies of government. In a democracy, where “we the people” are the final word in public policy, Christians must be especially active in seeking to bring glory to God by the laws and policies enacted and administered in our name and for our wellbeing. Persuasion is the vehicle we use to accomplish such God-honoring ends.

Three duties

In addition to these three *means* for seeking peace, the Christian is tasked with three *duties* in helping to influence public policy, which subsequent installments in this series will address and illustrate.

First, Christians must study to *understand the Law of God* in its original context and setting and with a view to its contemporary application. We must take up the discipline of reading, meditating in, and studying the Law of God with a view to gaining a clear understanding of what God intended for His people as they entered the land of Canaan back during the second millennium before the coming of Christ.

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From its original context we must work hard to develop our understanding of the spirit of the Law by considering how the rest of Scripture teaches us to discern it. The right application of the Law of God, and the principles for learning to make such applications, are explained and illustrated in the Scriptures beyond the Law, especially the writings of the Prophets, the Gospels, and the Epistles of the New Testament.

Second, as we have been arguing, Christians must *practice the Law as individuals and communities* so that the beauty and joy and strength which come from such obedience will be evident to our unbelieving neighbors (cf. Ps. 48.1-3; Mic. 4.1-5). By obedience to the Law, as previously explained, we hope to realize the promises and demonstrate the glory of God. This hope should become visible in our obedience, thus creating possibilities for the larger application of God's Law for His glory.

Third, we must work hard to *understand the times and to discern public policies* which can extend the promised blessings of God—short of salvation, which is only by the Gospel—to our neighbors and our society as whole (1 Chron. 12.32; Jer. 29.11). We must work together to understand public policy so that we can craft or commend policies that are more in keeping with the teaching of God's Law. Then we must, by prayer and persuasion, work to implement those policies in ways appropriate to the need and the opportunity before us.

A view to the long haul

Change will often be gradual and disappointingly slow. Recall the generation-long effort to abolish slavery, the struggle for women's enfranchisement, the civil rights campaign of the '50s and '60s, and the overturning of *Roe v Wade*. We must nurture a vision of the coming of the Kingdom of God, as Jesus did in His parables, and consider ways of seeking the rule of Christ in every area of life, including the arena of public policy. This will require that we identify areas where public policy is not in line with God's Word and begin to envision new policies that are more likely to honor Him and to bring the blessings of His justice and love to our nation. Believers must seek to influence the political vision of the nation in the direction of righteousness and peace. This will mean participating at all levels of the political process, seeking candidates for office who are open to considering Biblical principles and guidelines, and putting in place strategies for achieving Kingdom progress in public policy over time.

We can expect the Lord and King of His Law to bless our efforts, and to bless our neighbors as well, as we are faithful, for the long haul, in seeking to bring the love of God and neighbor to light through faithful adherence to the Law of God.

For reflection

1. Why do you suppose that public policy today has little regard for what the Law of God teaches?
2. What would you say to someone who insisted that Christians should just stay out of the public policy arena?
3. What can you do to begin preparing yourself to have more influence in matters of public policy?

Next steps—Transformation: According to Psalm 1, the righteous person meditates on God's Law day and night, day by day. Is this your practice? Should it be? What can you do to begin becoming more familiar with the Law of God?

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For reflection or discussion

1. Why is the Law of God an appropriate standard for thinking about public policy?
2. The Law of God does not save us. But we can expect the blessings of God to be more in abundance where the Law of God is honored. Explain.
3. If the Law of God does not serve as the guiding standard for public policy, what will?
4. Why is it essential that Christians and Christian communities rediscover the Law of God?
5. What is the most important lesson you've learned from this installment in our series "The Law of God and Public Policy"?

For prayer:

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