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## *THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW*

Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee . . . (Deut. 31:26).

We write laws in an attempt to control people . . . God did not. When our Pilgrim ancestors landed at Plymouth Rock, their little Mayflower Compact was utterly basic and simple. It was almost like Eden for legalistic simplicity.

The Pilgrims, however, saw the necessity of writing more laws. Each new law grew out of some special need. Down through the years we have accumulated literally thousands of laws, each written for the purpose of controlling us, yet we see a continual increase of lawlessness.

Certainly our laws have had some restraining influence upon society, but it is also equally obvious that laws have not corrected the basic problems of lawlessness in the human heart.

Caryl Chessman was executed on May 2, 1960. From all outward indications he went to the gas chamber utterly unchanged by the

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laws which condemned him to death. He is quoted in *Time Magazine*, September 13, 1982, pp. 42-43, as saying:

It seemed to me just as it usually seems to my kind, that society was simply trying to strip or rip off my shield, that it was willing to do so ruthlessly, that it didn't care about me personally, or the amount of humiliation or degradation it might inflict in the process. I stubbornly balked at being manipulated, regulated, or being compelled to conform blindly through fear or threat of punishment, however severe. Indeed, I came to question the validity of a society that appeared more concerned with imposing its will than in inspiring respect. There seemed to me something grossly wrong with this. "We'll make you be good!" I was told, and I told myself nobody should, would or could MAKE me anything. And I proved it.

I have in my possession a book of "Gun Laws." It is a rather large book about 8-1/2 by 11 inches and about an inch thick. It was given to me by a gun dealer and contains literally thousands of rules and regulations which are intended to control the use of firearms in the United States. It has not! Today we have more violations of these laws than ever before. Furthermore, if we were to write 20,000 more laws this year we would not solve the problem.

We write laws in an attempt to control people . . . God did not! He had more intelligence than that.

God knew that man would not even be able to keep one rule. That is why Jesus Christ knew, even before the foundation of the world, that He would have to die (I Pet. 1:20).

If Adam and Eve could not keep even one law in the Garden of Eden, what would make a rational person think that man could keep 10 laws at a later and less convenient time in history? Adam and Eve were created as perfect specimens in a sterile and spotless world that had never known sin. If they could not keep even one law . . . or if their conduct could not be controlled by law, certainly it is utter folly to think that law can solve our problems at this late hour.

If God did not give the law in an attempt to control people, why then did He give the law?

The text before us in Deuteronomy indicates that it was given as a witness against the children of Israel. Moses had observed their rebellion during his lifetime, and he anticipated an even greater

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rebellion after his death. This is categorically stated in Deuteronomy 31:27.

For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold while I am alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the Lord; and how much more after my death.

Certainly God established laws for different reasons than men do.

“ . . . THAT ALL THE WORLD MAY BECOME GUILTY . . . ”

Another aspect of law is seen through the inspired eyes of Paul in Romans 3:19:

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

It is the very nature of law with reference to man, that no one can keep it perfectly. Moses himself, through whom God gave the law, is a perfect example of this.

There is no question that Moses was not only the outstanding man of his generation, but also for generations yet to come. The Scriptures put it like this:

And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses whom the Lord knew face to face (Deut. 34:10).

So defensive was God of Moses that when Miriam dared to speak critically of him she was smitten with leprosy. Upon that occasion God explained:

If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? (Nu. 12:6-8)

Yet Moses was forbidden by God to enter into the land of Promise. You cannot understand why he was forbidden to do so until you understand the nature of law. It is the nature of law that whosoever keeps the whole law and offends in only one point, is guilty of it all (James 3:10). Therefore, all Moses had to do in order to become “guilty

before God” was to make one tiny little mistake . . . and this he did at Kadesh Barnea.

Early in their wilderness wanderings, God commanded Moses to “smite” a rock and it would bring forth water.

Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt SMITE the rock, and there shall come water out of it . . . (Ex. 17:6).

Now thirty-eight long years have gone by and God gives Moses another command. This time, however, he commands him to “speak” to the rock . . . not to “strike” it. And the Lord spake unto Moses saying: “. . . speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water . . .” (Nu. 20:8).

In the pressure and anxiety of that moment Moses disobeyed God and “smote the rock twice” (Nu. 20:11).

Now my friend, you are going to be introduced to the hard consequences of law. The very nature of law excludes mercy. The very nature of law was designed by God to make us guilty. Therefore, the judgment of God was given against Moses:

And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, because ye believed me not to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them (Nu. 20:12).

This fact is of such significance that it is repeated several times in the Scriptures.

And the Lord said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel. And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered. For ye rebelled against my commandment in the desert of Zin, in the strife of the congregation to sanctify me at the water before their eyes . . . (Nu. 27:12-14).

The same truth is also repeated in Deuteronomy 1:37; 3:26; 32:48-52; etc. Each time the failure of Moses to enter the Promised Land is associated with the technical blunder which he made at Kadesh Barnea in the wilderness of Zin. Upon this occasion Moses “struck” a rock that God had commanded him to only “speak” to. It was an event so trivial to most of us that it almost literally boggles the mind that God would make such a big deal out of it. If you do not understand the reason why God gave the law, you are apt to think of God

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as some sort of a dirty bully who wants to keep us from the blessings and promises which He has given.

Exactly the reverse is true. Jehovah is a God of infinite mercy, love, and compassion. He does not desire that any should perish, but that all come to repentance (II Pet. 3:9).

What happened to Moses was intended by God to teach us something which is very important. It was to demonstrate the utter futility of trying to achieve the promises of God through the law. It was to be a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith.

Moses was a deliverer, a mediary, and an intercessor. He did for the Hebrew people what Jesus has done for all mankind. For this reason Moses predicted:

The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me: unto him ye shall hearken (Deut. 18:15).

This prophecy was quoted by the Apostle Peter in Acts 3:22ff. and was in fact, fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

There is a sense in which Moses became "guilty" and there is also a sense in which Jesus became "guilty." For Him who knew no sin, God made to be sin that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (II Cor. 5:21).

### Schoolmaster

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24).

It is important for us to remember that God did not give us the Law in an attempt to control us. It was a "schoolmaster" to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith.

In His infinite wisdom He knew that man could never be controlled by external pressure. Such a system would never work. Therefore, He gave us the Law for a much higher and more noble purpose. He did not want us to be "conformed" by pressure from without, but "transformed" by pressure from within.

So, in His infinite wisdom and love, He gave us the Law. It was a bold experiment lasting some one thousand five hundred years. He wanted us to find out by personal experience the sadness and imperfections of a society based upon external laws. At the end of the

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experiment men were just as bad as they had always been, and perhaps even worse.

When the Law was given at Mt. Sinai, the nation was involved in an idolatrous orgy. They took off their clothes and corrupted themselves before a golden calf.

After 1,500 years man was just as corrupt as he had ever been . . . but he had learned to mask his corruption behind a veneer of self righteousness. Caiaphas and Annas did not do their dirty work in the open as did their ancestors. They had learned the art of duplicity and hypocrisy. They could devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They could appear righteous on the outside when in reality they were full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

The Law was not given to make men "self-righteous." It was given to make us "guilty."

The fact that Jesus was crucified by students of the Law is proof positive that men can pervert the Law and distort the purposes of God. Sin is merely the misuse of good things. Everything that God gave to us is good . . . but is also capable of being twisted and perverted into something which is bad.

The perversion of the Law by those men who crucified Jesus has been repeated in virtually every generation.

I am told that the devout Jew began his religious studies by memorizing the book of Leviticus . . . these who had such reverence for the Law were the very ones who crucified Him the first time. This leads me to the frightening conclusion that when He is crucified afresh and put to an open shame, this also may be done by students of the Scripture who in their misdirected zeal have missed the purposes behind the giving of the Law of God.

There is no question that God gave the Law.

There is also no question that God had a reason for giving the Law.

It is the purpose of this little book to show that the Law was given as a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Why do men write laws?
2. Do laws control us or not?

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3. Why did God write laws?
4. Did God's laws control people?
5. Why did students of God's law want to kill Jesus?
6. Whom do you think was closer to God, Caiaphas and Annas, or Herod and Pilate?
7. If given more time under the law of God would the Jews have become better or worse?
8. Which do you think is easier to deal with, idols like the golden calf (Exodus 32) or idols of the heart (Ezekiel 14:3)?
9. Why was it easier for the publicans and harlots to enter into the Kingdom of God than for the chief priests and the elders (Matt. 21:31)?
10. If God did not give the law to control people, why then did he give it?

