

The First Use of the Law

- **Pedagogical: Used to Reveal Sin**
- **Instructional and Accusatory**
- **Reveals Sin, Condemns the unregenerate, Tutors the Elect to Christ.**

To say that the Law has a Pedagogical use is to say that it reveals our sin and tutors us to Christ.

The first part is this: while it shows God's righteousness, that is, the righteousness alone acceptable to God, it warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns, every man of his own unrighteousness. For man, blinded and drunk with self-love, must be compelled to know and to confess his own feebleness and impurity...of itself the law can only accuse, condemn, and destroy. As Augustine writes: "If the Spirit of grace is absent, the law is present only to accuse and kill us." But when we say that, we neither dishonor the law, nor detract at all from its excellence. Surely if our will were completely conformed and composed to obedience to the law, its knowledge alone would suffice to gain salvation...[but] since all of us are proved to be transgressors, the more clearly it reveals God's righteousness, [and] conversely the more it uncovers our iniquity. The more surely it confirms the reward of life and salvation as dependent upon righteousness, the more certain it renders the destruction of the wicked....

The wickedness and condemnation of us all are sealed by the testimony of the law. Yet this is not done to cause us to fall down in despair or, completely discouraged, to rush headlong over the brink — provided we duly profit by the testimony of the law. It is true that in this way the wicked are terrified, but because of their obstinacy of heart. For the children of God the knowledge of the law should have another purpose...dismissing the misguided opinion of their own strength, they come to realize that they stand and are upheld by God's hand alone; that, naked and empty-handed, they flee to his mercy, repose entirely in it, hide deep within it, and seize upon it alone for righteousness and merit. For God's mercy is revealed in Christ to all who seek and wait upon it with true faith. In the precepts of the law, God is but the rewarder of perfect righteousness, which all of us lack, and conversely, [he is] the severe judge of evil deeds. But in Christ his face shines, full of grace and gentleness, even upon us poor and unworthy sinners.

The Second Use of the Law

- **Civil: Used to govern Citizens in a Polis or Nation**
- **Penal and Restraining**
- **Restrains Evil**

This civil use is the way we normally think of laws in general. They restrain evil. Even so, the Law that God gave through Moses in the Mosaic Covenant has this use. It keeps people from sinning. Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions... (Gal 3:19)

Not because people don't want to sin, but because they fear the punishment the Law demands for breaking the Law. However, when opportunity presents itself and the chances of getting away with our lawbreaking is greater than our chances of being caught and punished, we break the Law. So sin is still present in us, but the outworking of that sin is restrained by Law. That's why capital punishment is the only way to keep would-be murderers from becoming murderers and would-be sexual offenders from becoming sexual offenders.

The second function is this: at least by fear of punishment to restrain certain men who are untouched by any care for what is just and right unless compelled by hearing the dire threats of the law...Consequently, they are neither better nor more righteous before God...But this constrained and forced righteousness is necessary for the public community of men, for whose tranquility the Lord herein provided when he took care that everything be not tumultuously confounded...The apostle seems specially to have alluded to this function of the law when he teaches "that the law is not laid down for the just but for the unjust and disobedient" [etc., [1 Tim 1:9-10](#)]. He shows in this that the law is like a halter to check the raging and otherwise limitlessly ranging lusts of the flesh.

The Third Use of the Law

- **Didactic: Used to encourage Believers to Obedience**
- **Participatory and Inspirational**
- **Fosters Obedience by Revealing the Moral Nature of God**

The third and principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns. For even though they have the law written and engraved upon their hearts by the finger of God [[Jer 31:33](#); [Heb 10:16](#)], that is, have been so moved and quickened through the directing of the Spirit that they long to obey God, they still profit by the law in two ways.

Here is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it...For no man has heretofore attained to such wisdom as to be unable, from the daily instruction of the law, to make fresh progress toward a purer knowledge of the divine will.

Again, because we need not only teaching but also exhortation, the servant of God will also avail himself of this benefit of the law: by frequent meditation upon it to be aroused to obedience, be strengthened in it, and be drawn back from the slippery path of transgression...Doubtless David was referring to this use when he sang the praises of the law: "The law of the Lord is spotless, converting souls;...the righteous acts of the Lord are right, rejoicing hearts; the precept of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes," etc. [[Ps 19:7-8](#)]. Likewise: "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" [[Ps 119:105](#)], and innumerable other sayings in the same psalm [e.g. [Ps 119:5](#)].

These do not contradict Paul's statements [earlier], which show not what use the law serves for the regenerate, but what it can of itself confer upon man. But here the prophet proclaims the great usefulness of the law: the Lord instructs by their reading of it those whom he inwardly instills with a readiness to obey. He lays hold not only of the precepts, but the accompanying promise of grace, which alone sweetens what is bitter. For what would be less lovable than the law, if, with importuning and threatening alone, it troubled souls through fear, and distressed them through fright? [In this] David especially shows that in the law he apprehended the Mediator, without whom there is no delight or sweetness.

By CreedorChaos

<http://creedorchaos.wordpress.com/2009/03/20/more-from-calvin-on-the-uses-of-the-law-23-years-later/>