

# The Purpose of God's Law

We have a problem in society today. The longer society continues, the greater the problem becomes. We live in a world in which choice exists. People are free and able to choose for themselves. They are able to choose what suits them, what suits their taste, what suits their personality, what suits their background. There is no longer any reasonable approach to what is, say, a man's haircut, when you look at the younger men today. There is a vast variety of approaches to it. What is appropriate in terms of clothing? "What's your personality? What do you like?" And so it goes. It's fascinating. It's interesting.

The problem is that it can start to affect areas of lives where choice is not our prerogative. Sadly that aspect of choice ("what suits me?") is the approach that humanity takes to God's Word. "I will choose those parts of the Bible that suit me - those that do not make a demand upon me. Those that are easy for me to abide by."

We ourselves, over the past few years, have seen much creativity in terms of what parts of God's Word would be observed. Recently, the concept has been expounded that a large part of the Bible has been 'fulfilled in Christ' and therefore having been 'fulfilled in Christ', 'you don't have to worry about it any more'. All you have to worry about is the part that comes 'after Christ'. You've heard the argument, I'm sure.

Why do people like to ignore that part of the Bible? Sadly because it makes demands upon us. It requires something of you and me. It doesn't provide us with the opportunity of choice. People turn to Luke 24:44-45 to justify themselves. This was the time when Jesus Christ had been resurrected and the first time He appeared to the 10 of them (Thomas was not with them at this point and of course Judas had already taken his life). The 10 of them were present together with some of the others and He appeared to them:

*Luke 24: 44 Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me."*

In other words, this is a statement that defines what we today call the Old Testament. To the disciples, they would have been 'the Holy Scriptures'.

*45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.*

*46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,*

*47 "and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

Various people have gone through the Bible at various times to try and show that everything in the Old Testament pointed to Christ at His first coming. But there's a difficulty with that. If you turn to Acts (also written by the same author - Luke) we find the apostle Peter talking about repentance and saying:

*Acts 3: 19 "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,*

*20 "and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before,*

*21 "whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.*

Oh! The holy prophets spoke of the second coming of Jesus Christ as well! They spoke about the restoration of the Kingdom of God. Therefore the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ does not cut off all of the Old Testament in any way whatsoever. The Bible does not necessarily give us clear cut definitions of what relates to the first, and what relates to the second coming. There exists such a thing as duality.

A little later we find Paul speaking to Timothy (literally a person who was like a son to him):

*2 Tim 3: 14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them,  
15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

This was probably written to Timothy in the early 60s. When Timothy was a child, learning the scriptures, there was no New Testament. The only holy scriptures he had the opportunity of learning from were, what we euphemistically refer to today as, the Old Testament. Paul told him to continue in the things he had learned from his childhood, from the holy scriptures:

*15 ... which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

It's an astonishing thing for us to think of in our day and age when we have a Bible, possibly 3 or 4 copies sitting on our shelves at home, to think that the first generation of Christians existed without the New Testament. They were no less Christians than you or I nonetheless. So Paul told Timothy the Holy Scriptures were able to make him wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Knowing how the Old Testament pointed to Jesus Christ and the essential part of Jesus Christ in God's Plan for salvation, Paul continues:

*16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,  
17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

God does not provide us with the privilege of dividing His Word up and saying "I'll do this, but I won't do that." People discard Daniel chapter 9 as having no relevance to us. I think God will show us before the end of this age that it does have relevance to us. We don't necessarily understand all the ramifications of Daniel 9, but God will make sure we do at the right time, so we can appreciate it.

Jesus Christ told Satan that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God". That is probably the most broken scripture that ever exists. People think "I'm not interested in that. Forget it." Yet Jesus Christ said we are supposed to live by *every* word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. The challenge that we face is that if you look at Christianity around us, people love to divide God's law into multiple parts that are independent of one another. Yet Paul, in Romans 13:10 made a statement that denies that possibility:

*Rom 13: 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

Paul is saying that all of the law is some way related to love of neighbour, and by extension, God as well. He said it's all summed up in one word - love. But love gets distorted. Love becomes romantic and fuzzy around the edges 'as she bounces down the beach with her long blonde curls till she reaches his arms' whatever the case may be - or the dog leaps into hers!

That's not the kind of love that the Bible is talking about. One person tried to establish a definition for 'agape' which is the love that's being talked about here. He tried the very best to create a definition and I think he came to a very good conclusion because he said:

**"Agape is created. Agape creates value where no value exists."**

Agape is outgoing towards others. What value is there in us? We are dust! We could be blown away at any point in time. Our lives, our breath could be snatched from us and we could be dead. We are nothing. Our life is a vapour. We're feeble. Yet God, in His infinite wisdom and mercy has shown love towards us. He has created some value in His creation. He has said "I can use this for something greater than itself."

Agape is created. It creates value where no value exists. It's so easy for us to see someone we like and say "I love that person - but this person over here, I wish they'd drop dead." They see no value in that person. Godly love *demand*s that we see value in that person - a value equal to the value you see in the

person you like. God is not a respecter of persons. As Paul said "Love works no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the entirety of the law of God."

Jesus Christ was confronted by a lawyer who wanted to know what was the great commandment. Jesus Christ expanded it a little more. He said there were *two* great commandments. Jesus Christ saw what the man's difficulty was.

*Matt 22: 35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying,*

*36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"*

*37 Jesus said to him, " `You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'*

*38 "This is the first and great commandment.*

*39 "And the second is like it ...*

When we use the term 'second', oftentimes we think it is of secondary importance. It's not! Jesus Christ is literally saying this one is on the same level as this, because they interface together.

*39 "And the second is like it: `You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*

Notice how He concluded His statement:

*40 "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."*

Once again, He is using a little bit of shorthand to describe what we today would call the Old Testament. The entirety of the Old Testament is built upon the love of God and love of neighbour. Jesus Christ described it in two great commandments, yet two commandments that are of equal importance and inter-related.

We like to think of the Ten Commandments, but Jesus Christ also referred to some of the precepts, the judgments and the statutes that are given besides the Ten Commandments. Some people find it very easy to accept the Ten Commandments but they find other parts of the Bible very difficult to accept. This is a common problem for Christendom - they look at parts of the law of God relating to the tabernacle and think they are irrelevant 'because we don't have a tabernacle'. They look at the parts relating to agriculture and say "Irrelevant - I'm not a farmer. It doesn't speak to me. I don't need to read it, be concerned about it or even think about it."

One of these days these things *will* have their place in society. The difficulty is that we oftentimes are taught to read the surface of scripture, rather than plumbing the depths of it. The result is that if something is irrelevant to us, we skip over it and ignore it. We consider it immaterial and of no consequence to us. By doing that we are minimising the application of God's law.

There's a very fascinating aspect of the law of God. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks made a comment on this in one of his books. He drew attention to how many verses there are in Exodus relating to the creation and building of the tabernacle. There were approximately 450 - 470 verses! How many verses relate to the physical universe? Genesis chapter 1 has 31 verses. If we include chapter 2, to ensure we get all the creation in, there are another 25 verses making 56 verses. As Jonathan Sacks said "Which do you think is the most important to God? The creation of the tabernacle, or this physical universe?"

The tabernacle may have a lot more importance to God because of what its future is, yet how often do we ever sit down to really study the tabernacle? There are some really interesting lessons to be learned from the tabernacle and the way in which it was built and fitly framed together, in the way in which the Body of Christ is to be fitly framed together - the quality of the construction of the tabernacle - and later Solomon's temple.

Let's ask ourselves a fundamental question then: What was the ultimate purpose of God's law? When we refer to God's law, we have the first five books of the Bible which are referred to as 'the law', or more correctly in the Hebrew 'the torah'. The word 'torah' is better translated 'teaching' or 'instruction'. While the first five books include laws, statutes and judgments etc., and while they may have a judicial nature about

them, there are a lot of examples given of people's lives - people's lives lived in accordance with or contrary to God's instructions. There are genealogies given so we can understand where things came from and went to. In many ways it is teaching or instruction. The purpose of God's teaching or instruction is to build relationships - or kinship. That's what God's law exists for - to build relationships. The relationships are on different planes, based on different priorities.

It's firstly with God. We have to have that relationship with God and with His Son Jesus Christ. It is important. Then we have to have relationships with one another - with our spouse (if we've been blessed with one), and with a family (if God has also blessed us in that way). We have the opportunity of developing a family relationship - and of course it doesn't end there either - it grows into a community. And the communities eventually grow into nations and nations inter-relate (what we call international relations).

God's law exists to guide and direct each and every one of those relationships. Many of you may remember from the 1960s or early 1970s a song that was very popular - 'No Man is an Island. No man walks alone.' That's absolutely true. None of us exist for ourselves. People want to think they do, but God says "No you don't." One of the very first lessons that was taught within the pages of God's Word was a question asked by Cain of God "Am I my brother's keeper?". God answers that question in the rest of the book. The rest of the book addresses the fact that each and every one of us is our brother's (or sister's) keepers. Our responsibility is the care and the well-being for one another.

Let's have a look at some of the aspects of God's law and see just how they do show love, outgoing concern and respect - and as a result of that, build a relationship which is pleasing to God. Let's deal with some of the ones that relate to human beings. Let's look at some of the concepts relating to hygiene which are found within God's law.

Some might say "We live in a sophisticated society. We don't need to be concerned about hygiene one little bit. We've got it licked." Apart from when we have e-coli outbreaks, and mad-cow syndrome and various things of that nature occurring! We had a chicken salmonella scare about 5 years ago. But in the main we feel we don't need to concern ourselves about hygiene.

It struck me very much in 1990 because we were in Israel for part of the summer. It was the time of the height of the return of many Russian Jews to Israel. They had been granted freedom to emigrate from Russia to Israel. They bought with them a very sad situation - children were defecating in the streets - anywhere. Wherever they were when the urge of nature took them, they took care of it there and then. These people had lost sight of God's instruction relating to hygiene. They had no regard for it at all. They had been denied the opportunity of attending synagogues of religious instruction and schools. It was sad to see the consequence of that. These people had not realised that Deuteronomy chapter 25 said you had to conduct yourselves in a particular way in terms of the disposition of human waste. It was not to be left anywhere for anyone to walk through or any animal to be involved in. It was to be disposed of in a proper manner.

In Africa at times people have feelings of superiority because certain parts of the population have a much higher level of cleanliness and hygiene than others. We always forget that we're only about a century or so removed from when our forbears used to empty the chamber pot out of the front window of the house onto the road below. That was one of the reasons why the man used to walk on the outside of the pavement, so the lady at least was sheltered by the overhang of the house, from what maybe discarded from the top window.

We think we are great God-fearing people! We forget the Black Death in the 14th century in Europe which devastated so much of the population. It was brought about by our forbears' lack of understanding of the most basic things in terms of hygiene. The Black Death was so devastating in Europe that it took almost 2 centuries for the population to recover its former level.

One part of the population, apparently, was not affected by the Black Death. In fact the contrast was so stark that those people were accused of poisoning the wells of those who suffered. The difference was the hygiene standards that God had established. The Jewish communities did not suffer the Black Death the way that the so-called 'Christian' communities did. They still, at that point in time, as communities, maintained those standards. Those standards led to the reinforcement of a relationship. They were good for the community. They meant the people within the community would not suffer. But we think we are

sophisticated.

There was an elderly doctor in the London Church a number of years ago, when I was a student in Ambassador College, a Dr Rostrum. He had retired from medicine at that point in time but he was in the process of tabulating some material relating to the progress of 20th century medicine. He said "It really all comes down to the fact that man has finally stumbled upon the application of God's laws of hygiene. All of our advances have been because we inadvertently have started to do what God said we should do in the first place!

It's interesting. Yet we could have known it millennia beforehand, and our forbears could have been saved the problems they brought upon themselves. Who knows, we may have been a much healthier society today as a result of that. This doctor contended (and I know others would agree with him) that the advances of 19th and early 20th century medicine were simply a matter of humanity starting to learn the hygiene that God had established within His law from the very beginning. If we don't live by that, we suffer the consequences very badly.

Today we suffer from stress-related illnesses and other degenerative diseases, some of which could be avoided by obedience to God's Word. Careful attention to God's Word may also save us from others. We talked about the Black Death. There's another 'Black Death' today. What happened in Europe in the 14th century is now happening in Africa, not in terms of hygiene (although it is hygiene related), but in terms of 'Aids'. A major part of the African population is going to disappear off the globe - disappear from memory - simply because of Aids. It is having a devastating effect upon the nation. The spread of it is so rampant.

During the Feast we were staying in a hotel and I was up during the night, watching the television programme 'BBC News 24'. They were discussing a situation in Rwanda five years ago. You may remember the problem that occurred in Rwanda with the genocide between the Hutus and Tutsis. The BBC were reporting on another aspect of that - the rape of the women in Rwanda by the military. Apparently it had been orchestrated by the top. The military were principally HIV-positive, and the intent was to infect as many other women as possible! One woman who was now suffering from Aids and dying, had seen her own daughter raped something like 60 times by these soldiers. It was absolutely demonic. The BBC were interviewing ladies whose lives were about to come to an end. They had given birth to children whose lives also hung perilously in the balance. They were about to die - because people insist on disregarding the law of God. It's sad. Have we advanced at all since the Middle Ages? Sadly the answer seems to be 'no'.

Not heeding what God says about health or hygiene in the Bible is not loving our neighbour as ourselves. It's not showing love. Yet so often it's easy to pass it off, thinking we don't have to worry about that today. Yet we do because it's the way in which we teach others.

Bilharzia is another scourge of Africa. I understand from a very good authority that that could be stopped; the cycle could be broken if people would stop urinating in rivers and streams - if they would stop using streams as latrines, and simply do what God said to do with human waste - bury it. Let the ground take care of the filtration before it gets back into the water table. God intended things to happen that way - for everyone's benefit.

At this point, the continent is still ravaged at times and places by Bilharzia. People's lives are not what they should be because of that.

Let's have a look at another aspect of God's law. God made it abundantly clear within His law that people were to work. Even if they required some assistance, if they were impoverished, poor, they still had to work. We talk about 'third tithe'. An interesting aspect of third tithe is that it was never enough to take care of the individuals. So God said what you could do was to go into the harvest fields and glean behind the harvesters. Or once the grapes had been picked in the vineyard, you could go through a few weeks later and pick those that had ripened late. Then you could take them and dry them or press them and make wine for yourself. He told the landowner that if he left a sheaf of wheat in the field, he wasn't to go back after it. It was for the poor. The poor could have it - if he expended some effort.

Obviously there were people who were beyond working. They were taken care of, but God did not intend for people to laze around and be spongers upon the rest of society. He didn't want people to operate

that way. Notice what Paul said.

*2 Thess 3: 10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.*

- That's really putting it on the line. 'You work or your starve!' As Paul told Titus, if a man provides not for his own he has denied the faith and he's worse than a heretic.

What's the purpose of work? Why was God concerned about work? For many people it's survival - making ends meet. We've been at the Feast in Africa and we spent a lot of time with people who are subsistence farmers. They live to work and they work to live. That's the grind. If the harvest doesn't come in, they go hungry. It's very easy to get on that treadmill where you are working to make ends meet in life.

Of course that's not the only reason for work. There's a whole spectrum of reasons why people work, ranging from survival through to the accumulation of wealth - trying to aggrandise themselves - make themselves to be someone.

But if you look at all the reasons that humanity brings for the purpose of work, as laudable as they may appear to be, they are all focused one way. They are focused upon the self. But God sees working as a means so that we can learn to give. What's the purpose of giving? To express concern for the well-being of others. To be concerned about others, so when God instructs people to work, He's not doing it just from the point of view of putting a meal on the table for ourselves, He wants us to learn some deeper lessons. He wants us to learn about a way of outgoing concern for others. As Mr Armstrong used to describe it 'the way of give'. Paul picked up on this as well:

*Eph 4: 17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind,*

- We read that and think "We're not Gentiles, therefore that verse doesn't apply to us". But as a nation we have so forgotten where God is that if it weren't for God's mercy and concern for us, we wouldn't know *who* we were! We may as well be called Gentiles because we lived in the futility of our minds. Our nation today operates according to the futility of the mind. We can think "We're Israelites. We're of the house of Israel. We're better than that." They may have been a little better than that in the first century. I think if Paul lived today he wouldn't express it in quite the same way. I think he would lump us all in together because our society does operate in the futility of mind.

Think of the case in point of hygiene. We consider ourselves a 'Christian' nation, a God-fearing nation. All of these things have been in God's Word for millennia. Did anybody ever give any regard to them? Very seldom. Did any leader try and change society as a result of them? I don't think so, in any way at all. Societies exist in the futility of their mind.

*18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;*

- That certainly describes us.

*Eph 4: 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*

*20 But you have not so learned Christ,*

- That is not the life you or I have been called to. It was not the life the apostle Paul was called to. It is not the life that anybody who is called by God, is called to. We're called out of that futility, out of that darkness, that licentiousness, that uncleanness and greediness. We are called to a new way of life.

*Eph 4: 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:*

*22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,*

*23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,*

The way we lived prior to understanding the Word of God was corrupt according to deceitful lusts. That's the way in which God described my life - your life - anyone's life He calls. It was not what God was looking for. He says "Let me now show you a way that is going to change things. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind."

*24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

How do you go about doing this? In the next verse Paul takes us right back into it.

*25 Therefore, putting away lying ...*

Where do we read about lying in Scripture? We go right back into God's instruction of "Bear not false witness".

*25 ... "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.*

If we are going to say something to somebody else, it needs to be for their benefit. It needs to help them, to build them up, not destroy either you or them in the process. We exist to help one another. There are times when we don't need to say anything. We don't have to go around saying "Your shirt doesn't match the colour of your eyes", whatever the case may be. Some things are best left alone! They are immaterial. Some people want to tell others everything they think about the person.

That's not what Paul is talking about here. He says "Don't lie to one another." Don't try and get the advantage of another person by misrepresenting truth. Don't do that. We are to speak the truth with our neighbour for we are members of one another. We have that kinship. We're a family. We have to stand together. We have to build the family and strengthen it.

*26 "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath,  
27 nor give place to the devil.*

Don't let Satan in anywhere. That is an overriding principle in terms of putting on the Spirit of God. Being created according to God in righteousness and true holiness. You don't give place to the devil.

*28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.*

In our penal system today, what do we seek to do? If someone is a thief we incarcerate them to stop them stealing. Sadly they get a postgraduate degree in stealing so that when they come out of prison, they are ten times worse than they were when they went in! They are seldom reformed.

The change that God wants is that the person stops stealing - but that's just not enough. Certain societies (like the Islamic world) really help people stop stealing. They're really constructive about it. I remember clearly one time I was in Kenya and read about a Kenyan being sent home from Saudi Arabia. He had had his right hand cut off. Why? Because he had picked up an ingot of gold that had been sitting on the hard standing outside a customs shed at one of the airports for weeks. Eventually it got too much for him. He thought he could get away with it. He took it.

So in the process in terms of Islamic law, he had his hand removed. He will never steal anything with that hand again. But he may still want to! He could still lust after stuff. He could still think "How could I do it? Could I shuffle it out of the way with my foot?" God said just stopping is not sufficient. You have to go beyond that.

*28 ... let him labor, working with his hands what is good ...*

- Provide for yourself. There's a good principle to work by. Provide for yourself. But it doesn't end there. The reason he has to do that is so that he can learn to become a giving individual.

28 ... *that he may have something to give him who has need.*

In other words, a thief who lusts after something has got to put that lust out of his mind and be turned around so totally that now he's looking out for the welfare of others. What a transformation of the mind! That is the mind of God. That's what God's law exists to teach us - how to build relationships, not destroy them. So often people have never been able to appreciate that.

Why did God tell people to work? So we can learn to be outgoing - so we can learn to take care of the needs of others, those who have real needs, and help them.

29 *Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.*

- To build the relationship rather than destroy it. The apostle Paul understood and appreciated that. He understood the depth of what God was saying in His law.

30 *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

31 *Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.*

32 *And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.*

- That's the result of putting on the mind of God. It's one that builds relationships - that understands the purpose of God's law is to build relationships.

Touching again on the aspect of work:

2 Thes 3: 10 ... *If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.*

Why? Because he realised this person was not learning the lessons that God's law demanded they learn. They were not developing the mind of God. Their mind was upon themselves, taking care of themselves, rather than caring for others.

11 *For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.*

- Busying themselves in other people's lives, trying to organise or rule other people's lives. They weren't working at all. That's not what God wants us to do.

12 *Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.*

- Get our hands dirty. Work!

13 *But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.*

The Church of God has done a lot of good. I certainly very much appreciate that. I appreciate that when I am talking about working that many of you have worked and you deserve the rest you might have at this point in time. Even within the Levitical priesthood there was a time at which retirement came, and the demands of the Levitical order of the priesthood were not required of a person. They could retire to their farm or their land and take care of the family.

What I am saying is not a demand that everyone go out and get a job. Many of you have worked hard and you've really learned some of these lessons. That is very very encouraging. It helps us see what God is intending by His law - the lesson is there for us to help us appreciate that. So don't grow weary of doing good because that's the ultimate purpose of what God's law is about.

Let's take one last example. As I said, most of you aren't farmers. The apostle Paul showed that God's law was not just to be read on the surface. Just as he talked about the thief, he understood the depth of what God was trying to convey to us. That we in fact are to be giving people. Being a thief is the exact opposite of



what God wants. He uses the same approach in terms of agriculture - in terms of cows or cattle:

*1 Cor 9: 1 Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?*

*2 If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.*

*3 My defense to those who examine me is this:*

*4 Do we have no right to eat and drink?*

Was it not a right for Paul, as a minister, to be able to eat and drink?

*5 Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?*

*6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?*

We've going to keep at it. We're going to take care of our own income and also take care of the Church at the same time. Paul raises some questions:

*7 Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?*

*8 Do I say these things as a mere man? ...*

- Or are these enshrined within God's law? Isn't this a principle that comes out of God's law? Yes it is.

*8 ... Or does not the law say the same also?*

*9 For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain."...*

Why? Because the cattle need to be taken care of. It's very easy for people to be abusive in terms of their relationship with their property.

*9 Is it oxen God is concerned about?*

- Yes, on the surface, He was concerned about the oxen. But it was simply showing us an insight into the mind of God. God is concerned about those who do things for others.

*10 Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope.*

*11 If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?*

*12 If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.*

*13 Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar?*

*14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.*

He was clearly looking at the law of God, and taking a principle out of the law of God which probably didn't have any relationship for the people at Corinth. Why? Because Corinth was a big city and I would guess, when the resurrection comes around, you will probably find that not too many of them had cattle. They probably didn't tread out the grain frequently themselves. They just went down to the market and bought a bushel or two. Maybe they even bought it ground, baked their daily bread and went about their daily lives and thought "That part of the law of God has no relevance for me at all."

Paul said "Yes it does, because it wasn't written just for the cattle. You can't excuse yourself from it because you don't have a cow. It affects every other aspect of our lives." We don't have cows today but we have motor cars. How do we take care of the motor car? If we don't put some 'grain' in there, it's not going to go very far.

We used to live in Texas. Sometimes the students would drive across the continent and across the deserts to California. They would say "How quickly can we do it? Can we do roughly 1500 miles in 24

hours?" The only time they would stop was to put some more petrol in the fuel tank. They were a few cars that broke down along the way because the students never thought to lift the bonnet and see if the engine needed a little bit of oil. Or maybe it needed a little bit of water or coolant to help it on its way. They forgot that principle. "That just relates to cows. It doesn't relate to cars."

Well, yes it does. It relates to anything we are responsible for. Anything that's producing something - some benefit - for us. It has an application. God expects us to see things in depth rather than just skim across the surface. As a result of that, we build relationships. We show love. We show outgoing concern for those things that we have responsibility for.

And so the aspect of "What parts of God's law or God's Word are relevant to us?" is not a question at all. Because as Jesus Christ told Satan "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

If we are wanting to put on the new man, the mind of God, if we are wanting to build that relationship that God wants us to build, both within our family and within the greater community of the Church, the law of God is the place we will go to, to find what the mind of God really is. Then we really can build that relationship that God desires.

The law of God is not just an end in itself. It's an opportunity for those who are prepared to study and seek Godly understanding, to come to have insight into the very mind of God. And not just an insight, but with the aid of God's Holy Spirit, to create within our own lives that same mind. Not for our own benefit - but for the benefit of the rest of humanity.

-- *Peter Nathan*  
23 Oct 99

[Back to Top](#)

[Back to Sermon Summary List](#)