

The Hymns We Sing  
Sermons on the Great Hymns  
The Law of God is Good and Wise

*With Study Questions*

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# The Law of God is Good and Wise

*Romans 7:7-13*

This morning we will examine a hymn written in 1873 by Matthias Loy. The topic, as the title clearly indicates, is the law of God.

*The law of God is good and wise  
And sets His will before our eyes  
Shows us the way of righteousness  
And dooms to death when we transgress*

## **The Law is Good**

A recurring theme through the Old and New Testaments is the goodness of the law of God. David declares, **“Therefore I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold”** (Psalm 119:127). Paul echoes this in Romans saying **“the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good”** (Romans 7:12).

## **The Law Attacked**

Yet today, even among Christians, the law of God is very much ignored or under attack. I presented an oral report in seminary where I described the process of sanctification (growing in faith) as, (in response to having been saved by grace), a new found appreciation, love and embracing of God’s law. The professor’s only response was to ask me if I were Reformed. It didn’t take long for me to realize that the idea of seeking to obey the law of God was passé. I thought my Calvinism made me a minority! It was easier to find someone to cozy up to Calvinism than to the law of God. Much of the church finds itself in the same condition as Israel during the time of Isaiah, which caused him to write:

**Therefore, as the fire devours the stubble, and the flame consumes the chaff, so their root will be as rottenness, And their blossom will ascend like dust; because they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 5:24).**

## **Led by Spirit or Law?**

One need not be much of a logician to recognize that we simply cannot know the will of God apart from His law. People who view being led by the Spirit as a replacement for the law of God not only misinterpret the text – it

becomes a practical impossibility as soon as two spirit-led people disagree on any subject. Apart from the law of God, discerning righteousness becomes impossible and every man is simply left to do what is right in his own eyes (Deuteronomy 12:8), which is not a positive characteristic according to Scripture.

The final line of this first stanza “And dooms to death when we transgress” can be quite shocking, and maybe the reason people shy away from the law of God. This is, however, explained in the next stanza.

*Its light of holiness imparts  
The knowledge of our sinful hearts  
That we may see our lost estate  
And seek deliverance ere too late*

### **Reveals Sin**

Paul reveals that he would not have known sin to be sin apart from the law (Romans 7:13). The law of God truly discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart and there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account (Hebrews 4:12, 13). In this respect the law of God is like a scalpel that cuts and opens and reveals the dismal condition of the human heart and its need for redemption. The heart is dead and must be made alive prior to the second death or the second death will have dominion over it (Revelation 20:6).

### **Preserving Value to the Believer**

Are we, therefore, to surmise that this function of the law is only of value to the unbeliever? Clearly not! Certainly we are not going to suggest that it is unimportant for the believer to more fully grasp his need for redemption. In this respect the law is not merely a guide to righteous living; it also serves as a continual diagnosis of our fallen estate, thus pressing the believer into a great appreciation, and embracement of his redemption. The law of God functions as a preserving element causing us to hold fast (Hebrews 3:6; 4:14) our confession.

Whether prior to, or subsequent to salvation, the law shows us and reminds us that we don't want to be set afloat seeking to navigate the waters of God's righteous demands to some safe haven on our own. We most assuredly recognize our need for help. The help – the redemption – is found in Christ.

*To those who help in Christ have found  
And would in works of love abound  
It shows what deeds are His delight  
And should be done as good and right*

### **Law Expresses Love**

It shouldn't be thought that the law of God is merely a function in regeneration (being born again). It certainly plays a role in both saving and preserving the saints, but it does more. Obedience to the law is a person's expression of love for God. Jesus taught that if we loved Him we ought to keep His commandments (John 14:15). John writes,

**By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. <sup>3</sup> For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:2, 3).**

Jesus also taught that loving God and loving our neighbors are summaries of the Ten Commandments (Matthew 22:40). And since law is the means by which we express our love for God, those who more fully recognize God's authority and great love for them are under a greater obligation to seek to obey. The Westminster Confession, chapter XIX, paragraph five states,

**The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. Neither doth Christ, in the Gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.**

*When men the offered help disdain  
And willfully in sin remain  
Its terror in their ear resounds  
And keeps their wickedness in bounds*

### **Restraining the Wicked**

Though the end result may outwardly appear similar, the law of God has a much different affect upon those who reject the gospel. Apart from the gospel the law is a ministry of death (2 Corinthians 3:7). It restrains sinful man, not because man sees the law as the wonderful wisdom and counsel of a loving Father, but because of fear of punishment. Even though God may discipline or punish His children, we can recognize it is an act of love versus terror (Genesis 20:3).

*The law is good, but since the fall  
Its holiness condemns us all  
It dooms us for our sin to die  
And has no power to justify*

### **Sanctification, Not Justification**

The law has no power to justify. How often the modern Christian's disdain for the law gets down to his ignorance of justification by faith. How often the objection is blurted, "Why are you trying to put people under the law? We're not saved by keeping the law." No orthodox person is suggesting that we're saved by keeping the law (at least not *our* keeping of the law). The law reveals our sin – the law reveals what's right – the law reveals the character of God.

### **Two Errors**

In short, there are two errors to avoid: The first error is antinomianism. This is the view that Christian need not seek to obey the law of God. Those who do not seek to obey the law of God reveal an unregenerate heart. As John writes, "**Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3)**. Of course most Christians, though poorly taught, still realize that God has called His children to a standard of living (Ephesians 4:1). So even though, in theory, they may argue against the law, in practice they still seek to be faithful, honest, etc.

The second error is auto-soteriology – salvation by works. If we think we are keeping God's law at any satisfactory level to achieve our own salvation we are sadly mistaken. This is more common among the unbeliever. The unbeliever must come to realize that his law keeping will never justify him before God. By the grace of God, he must come to understand the incapacitating nature of his own sin. And having realized this he must flee to Jesus.

*To Jesus we for refuge flee  
Who from the curse has set us free  
And humbly worship at his throne  
Saved by His grace through faith alone*

### **Fleeing From Law to Christ**

Terror, wrath, condemnation and damnation are the wake of the law apart from Christ; and this due to the sin of man, not the sin of the law. We don't blame courtrooms for the sentence given the guilty, we rather praise their justice. There is a righteous judge who will in no way acquit the guilty (Exodus 23:6) and

the wise man flees for the refuge of Christ. The wrath and condemnation we deserved He took upon Himself. He is the Creator (Revelation 4:11) and the Redeemer (Revelation 5:9) and is therefore worthy of our humble worship.

### **By Grace Through Faith**

The song ends with what became the battle cry of the Reformation. We are saved by His grace through faith alone. Ephesians 2:8, 9 teaches we are saved by grace through faith; not as many modern interpreters would suggest by grace and faith. God saves us from our blindness and lifelessness by granting us saving faith. The faith that justifies (Romans 5:1) is not our contribution to our salvation. Faith itself is a gift paid for by the blood of Christ. To Him alone be the glory!

## Questions for Study

1. Why is the law of God necessary to determine true righteousness (pages 2, 3)?
2. What are some values the law of God provides (pages 3, 4)?
3. How does the law of God affect the wicked (page 4)?
4. Discuss the law and its role in justification versus sanctification (page 5).
5. What are two errors to be avoided when it comes to God's law (page 5)?
6. When we realize the effects of sin, where must we flee (pages 5, 6)?
7. What are some reasons Jesus is worthy of our worship (pages 5, 6)?
8. What would be the difference between being saved by grace through faith versus by grace and faith (page 6)?