

The Several Functions of the Law

Written by: Dr. Eddie Bhawanie

Almighty God rules His universe by law. Nature itself operates under His providential government. The laws of the universe are expressions of God's sovereign will. God operates in the universe according to His own laws. He is not accountable to any laws outside of Himself. God is a law unto Himself. He acts according to His own nature. God's law is the ultimate standard of righteousness, by which He judges right and wrong. All mankind is under the laws of God.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul declares; “. . .*all who rely on the law are under a curse*” (Galatians 3:10). In Galatians 2:16 Paul used the expression three times, meaning ‘those who are of the works of the law’ (literally) “all who rely on observing the law.” The reason why Paul says that all people are ‘under a curse’ is that Scripture (The Old Testament) says they are: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law” (Deut. 27:26).

No human being has ever “continued” to do “everything” the law requires. Such continuous obedience has been given by no-one *except* Jesus Christ. So “clearly” (Gal. 3:11) says nobody “is justified before God by the law,” because nobody has kept it perfectly all the time. Besides, Scripture also says that, “the just will live by faith” (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:13 and Hebrews 10:28).

Living “by faith” and living “by law” are two completely different states (see Gal. 3:12). The logical conclusions are different. The “cure” or judgment of God, which His law pronounces on the law-breakers, rests upon us. This is the appalling predicament of lost humankind! Sacred Scripture shows that God intends His Law to function *in several ways*.

The *first* function of the Law is to show Who God is, and to reveal His holy character and His perfect righteousness. The Law makes man's sinfulness known (Romans 3:20). Augustine wrote, “The law binds us, as we try to fulfill its requirements, and become wearied in our weakness under it, to know how to ask for the help of grace.” The Law gives knowledge of sin (Romans 3:19-20; 4:15; 5:13; 7:7-11; 1Tim.1: 7-9), and by showing us our need of pardon, and our danger of damnation, the Law will lead us to repentance, and faith in Christ (Gal. 3:19-24).

The *second* function of the Law is to show the increase of sin in the human mind, because the works of the Law cannot change the nature of the person doing them. The Law can only *reveal* sin and *not* remove it. Paul said, “I had not known sin, but by the Law; for I had not known lust, except the Law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the Commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence (lustful passion). . . .” (see Rom. 7:7-8).

No amount of Law-keeping can make a person righteous, because the *root* of man's sinfulness is in the *fallen-ness of man's heart*. Man's basic problem is in *what he*

is, not in what he does. (Matt.15:15-20). However, sinful acts are but the outward expression of the fallen nature that contains sinful thoughts (see Romans 3:19-20).

The ***third*** function of the Law is to reveal God’s wrath and judgment (Romans 1:18). The Law reveals that man knows something about God and His Laws, but he hates what he knows; therefore, man buries what he clearly knows about The Truth—in his rebellion and wickedness.

The ***fourth*** function of the Law is “civil use,” that is to restrain evil. Though the law cannot change the human heart, it should make man afraid of sinning, and afraid of going to hell. The function of the Law is curbing lawlessness in man. The Law threatens judgment, especially when backed by a civil code of jurisprudence that administers punishment for proven offenses (Deut.13: 6-11; 19:16-21; Rom. 13:2-4; I Tim.1: 8-11). Thus the Law is meant to secure civil order, and to protect the righteous from the unrighteous.

The ***fifth*** function of the Law are: (i) that flesh shall not be justified by the law, because it does not have the ability to forgive sins (Gal. 2:16), (ii) to guide the unregenerate man to Jesus Christ, and to show that salvation is by Faith (Romans 10:4), and (iii) to guide the ***regenerate*** into the good works that God has planned for them (Eph. 2:10). After being born-again, there should be a redemptive element in all that the Christian does.

The ***sixth*** function of the Law is to show that the Law is an organic whole—the Law is a unit, to break one Law is to be guilty of breaking all of them” (James 2:10; Gal. 5:3).

Finally, because man does not keep the Law does not mean that the Law fails? No! The Law accomplishes its exact purpose because;

- (i) Through the Law the knowledge of sin is revealed (Rom. 3:20; 7:7).
- (ii) The Law works wrath (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:10).
- (iii) The Law shows the sinfulness of man (Rom. 7:13).
- (iv) The Law was added because of transgression (Gal. 3:19).
- (v) The Law was given so that the *sin* offence of man against God might abound (Rom. 5:20).
- (vi) The Law is a tutor to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24).
- (vii) The Law is good, holy and righteous (Rom. 7:12).

The Law tells God’s children what will please Him (1 John 3:22; ***keep*** His Commandments and ***do***) what pleases Him. Christ was speaking of this use of the Law when He said that those who become His disciples must be taught to “***do all***” that He had Commanded (Matt. 28:20). Obedience to His commands will prove one’s love for Christ (John 14:15). The Christian is ***free from the law as a system of salvation*** (Rom. 6:14; 7:4-6; 1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 2:15-19; 3:25), but is “under the law of Christ” as a ***rule of life*** (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2).

Summary:

Jesus Christ is the final Guarantor of the Truth of man's salvation, and regeneration from sin, guilt, and shame. Paul reminds the Jewish believers in Rome, and in Galatia, and all those who seek to be justified by The Law, and all Christians throughout history:

“Now we know that what things so ever the law said, it says to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:19-20).

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse: for it is written, ‘Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them’” (Galatians 3:10, is a direct quotation from Deut. 27:26).

These passages teach everyone, and anyone, who trusts in any law keeping, or in their own good works, anyone who points to his/her record to be justified, or uses human works (performance) as a means to achieve, or to have a right relationship, with God –is cursed! God's standard is **perfection**, which **no fallen human being has achieved**, or can achieve. Paul reminds us **that Christ met the demands of the Law** –through the curse of redemption:

“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, by becoming a curse for us: for it is written, ‘Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree’” (Gal. 3:13; Deut. 21:23).

When Christ took the *curse of the Law* on Himself and so identified with human sin and guilt; He became a **curse**. The holy, just Judge of the universe “cut Him off from the land of the living” (Isaiah 53:8b). At that moment, Christ on the Cross, had all human sins concentrated on Him. Because of human sin, He was horribly disfigured, and He was the most grotesque, and repulsive Person to look upon. This is how God sees sin, and how God saw Him on the Cross.

Because of the Cross, Christ justifies all those who believe in Him by buying them back from their slavery to sin. The price He paid was high enough to redeem all of mankind. Peter says that Christians are redeemed with, “the precious blood, as of a Lamb without spot and blemish, the blood of Christ” (I Peter 1:19). “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (I Peter 2:24; and Acts 5:30).

The sobering reality is, *if* Jesus Christ was not forsaken on the Cross –by the living God; then, we are still in our sins; we have no redemption; and we have no salvation from sin. Christ took our sins so we will not be required to pay the price for sins! The Christian man/woman is saved from sins: (i) by the perfect life of Christ, and (ii) by His death, and His resurrection from the dead!