

Morality and Law

“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:17, ESV)

Some hold this conviction: "It's not possible to legislate morality." Others ask, "What about giving the Law to Moses?" These others often claim that the way to raise the morals of society is to have the right laws. Many charge into battle to implement public policy in world governments, convinced that the human heart can be changed by enacting human law. Should Christians try to enforce morality through making legislation?

As for Moses and Israel according to the flesh, God indeed gave them law that represented his will: what was pleasing to God, what was not pleasing to God, what was clearly abomination and what was not. Speaking of Israel in the wilderness, God said: "For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them: 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.'" (Jer. 7:22-23) God initially brought Israel out and expected them to obey him without the necessity of keeping a law. But, what happened? God gave them a law only after they would not simply listen and obey.

Paul explains why God did this: "Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come." (Gal. 3:19) Law exposes sin as sin. (Rom. 7:13) These are the purposes and functions of law: It was added because of sin. It was added to expose sin for what it is.

Is there a law which makes a person become moral? Does regulating actions regulate motives of the heart? Why is it better to obey the lawgiver than to sacrifice according to the law? (1 Sam. 15:22) The Bible tell us, "When the rule of Rehoboam was established and he was strong, he abandoned the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him." (2 Chron. 12:1) If morality could be perfectly implemented by law, how could this happen? The Bible explains, "And he did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the LORD." (2 Chron. 12:14)

Didn't God call Israel to obey before the law? Doesn't he call Christians to obey today after the law? A call to morality is not a call to obey the law but to obey the lawmaker: Someone who obeys God must first know God and desire to please him. (Heb. 11:6) Let us not attempt to craft tradition or law in order to bind it on others. Instead, let us lead others to God with our personal example of obedience.