

Redeemer Presbyterian Church Men's Leadership Training The Law and Conscience¹

March 17, 2010

RE Jeff Smith

What is “the good life”? Describe elements of what you, personally, believe characterize a satisfying and blessed life for yourself.

Are true Christians “under law” or not? Compare Rom. 6:14 and Gal. 3:10-13 with Mt. 5:17-20 and 1 Cor. 9:20-21.

What is “law” in the biblical sense?

- First five books of Scripture (“Pentateuch”), *cf.* Mt. 5:17.
- The entire Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), *cf.* 1 Cor. 14:21 (quoting Isa. 28:11,12).
- Any command anywhere in Scripture, *cf.* Jas. 1:25; 1 Jn. 3:4.
- The entire Bible, and indeed all of God’s revelation throughout creation, *cf.* 1 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 2:14-15.

Three kinds of (Old Testament) law, per *Westminster Confession of Faith* XIX, para. II-IV:

- II. This law [given to Adam by God], after [man’s] fall, **continued** to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables: the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man.
- III. Besides **this law, commonly called moral**, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, **ceremonial** laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, His graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly, holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are **now abrogated, under the New Testament**.
- IV. To them also, as a body politic, He gave sundry **judicial** laws, which **expired together with the State of that people**; not obliging under any now, further than the general equity thereof may require.

Threefold use of the (moral) law for all times and places:

1. Restraint of sin in society at large (Rom. 2:14-15; 1 Cor. 5:1).
2. Conviction of sin, leading the elect to depend upon Christ (Rom. 5:20-21; Gal. 3:19-25).
3. Guide for living the faithful, fruitful Christian life (Mt. 28:19-20).

¹ This lesson complements Chapter 9, “Law and Liberty,” in *When Grace Comes Home*.

Some implications of the “third use” of the law:

- While relying on our law-keeping for salvation will bring upon us a curse (Gal. 3:10-12), the law itself is good (Rom. 7:12 *ff.*) and is a way of blessing (Ps. 1; Ps. 119:58,116,123,140,155-156,162) when we are freed by faith in Christ from the law’s penalties for disobedience (Col. 2:13-15; see also Rom. 4:6-8, about the probable author of Psalms 1 and 119!).
- Sanctification (*i.e.*, growing in Christlikeness) is more than simply “getting used to” one’s own justification (*i.e.*, being considered righteous by God on account of Christ’s merits).
- The concepts of “law” and “gospel” overlap in Scripture (and should be understood as distinct from the “works” and “faith” dichotomy, *cf.* Rom. 4:4-5; Gal. 2:15-16). The gospel is a divine command to be obeyed (2 Th. 1:8); at the same time the law comes with and is even preceded by good news (Ex. 20:2).
- The life God desires for us is to be justified by trust in Christ and to be progressively sanctified, becoming like him—therefore growing in obedience to God’s law as a forever-forgiven and adopted son of God (Eze. 36:27; Jer. 31:33-34; 1 Tim. 1:8-9a; Tit. 2:11-14).

Proper motives for obedience to God (God’s law):

- Trusting his promises of blessing for obedience, *cf.* Eph. 6:1-3; Rom. 8:5-7 (“life and peace”).
- Fearing his threats of chastisement for disobedience, *cf.* 1 Cor. 11:27-32; Jas. 4:1-3.
- Loving him out of gratitude for his love for us first, *cf.* Jn. 14:15,21-24; 1 Jn. 4:10,19.

The conscience: a moral reflex serving (imperfectly) as God’s “inner spokesman” for his law:

- Every human being has one, not just Christians, *cf.* Rom. 2:15.
- Paul in Acts 24:16: “So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.” Our obedience to God entails obedience to conscience.
- The conscience always needs to be obeyed, but also needs to be continually trained so that it is bound and loosed by Scripture (God’s law), and not according to *mere* human rules and perceptions, *cf.* 1 Cor. 4:4; 1 Cor. 8 and 10; Mk. 7:8; 1 Jn. 18-22; Rom. 13:5.

... Which brings us back to the subject of living “the good life” as God, who created reality, defines it.

- When we read of being conformed to the image of Christ (who perfectly obeyed and obeys God’s law), do we doubt that this is actually good news for us? See Jn. 4:33-35; Heb. 12:2-3,7-11; Ps. 16 (note: a prophetic Psalm). Was Jesus *satisfied* with his life of living according to God’s law?
- What kind of “self-talk” should we use when we are tempted to doubt that obeying God is the desirable path?