

## THE LAW AND THE SCARECROW

*“Accuracy of observation is the equivalent of accuracy of thinking.”<sup>1</sup>*

Any investigation into any topic requires an accurate perspective of what is being studied. If one wants to correctly understand how something works, or even evaluate if something is a good option, they need all the facts. Now, of course, no one can have perfect knowledge, but enough information beyond a one-dimensional evaluation. This is true of a new car, a global issue, health insurance, mortgage arrangement, or diet. Children are the worst at this. They look at some piece of food, and because of its colour, decide they hate it. Typically, the conversations usually go like this.

“It’s disgusting...”

“You haven’t even tried it. You’ll like it.”

“No. It’s yucky...”

Luckily, most of my children are approaching adolescence and will now eat pretty much everything, but it is a frustration many parents go through. And as people grow up, some move on, others still hold onto negativity biases;

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace Stephens.

they just apply it to bigger issues like politics, economics, and religion. Rather than wanting to understand all elements of any given issue, they hold onto one narrow aspect of it, come to a conclusion, and fight for it. The problem with this is that such narrow understandings result in rash reactions and narrow conclusions. Using global warming as an example, if someone says that X is the cause and ignores other influences, then the solution isn't going to be as effective. If we want to understand something correctly, we need to investigate and evaluate it accurately, lest we end up setting fire to a straw man.

As followers of Christ, it is important that our theology and our understanding of the character and nature of God is developed and built on accurate engagement with the Word. Different people may come to different conclusions on different topics, and that's okay. What counts is that we put in the time and effort to consider the totality of God's revealed Word, and not just proof texts, to build a more accurate theology. In its extreme, proof-texting ends up creating cults and dangerous theologies, but for the most part, it is on secondary or adiaphorous matters that aren't overly important and should create little to no disunity. The topic of this book falls into this category. While I know many people who disagree with me on the role of the Law in Christianity, I happily call them brothers and sisters in Christ because we are still united in the Gospel. That they disagree

is not the issue I'm addressing here. The issue of concern is the nature of the discussions about the topic, and how they arrived at that conclusion.

In my experience, the problem I have observed with most critiques of the Law is that they are usually straw man arguments. They attack caricatures of the Law that ignore what much of scripture has to say about it, with appeals to what Luther or the protestant tradition would think. Some of the Early Church Fathers by their anti-Semitic polemic that called the Law a punishment and curse on 'those evil Jews' have handed many of these caricatures down to us. There are also those in church history who said that the Law is so antithetical to the Gospel, it should have no relevance whatsoever to the believer. This latter thought is more common today and arises when one considers the individual commandments in isolation from their context in scripture. Instead of seeing them as demonstrations of love and gratitude for redemption in a covenantal, relational setting, they describe the commandments as legalistic burdens. The result of which is an understanding that the 'Old Covenant' is about perform-to-get, and void of grace.

However, even a cursory glance at the Old Testament will reveal that it contains many instances of grace and forgiveness independent of obedience, performance and conformity. Although the Mosaic Covenant does say there are consequences for disobedience, this is a principle

shared by the New Testament as well. Consider Ananias and Sapphira,<sup>2</sup> the greedy believers in Corinth,<sup>3</sup> and the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews,<sup>4</sup> to name a few. Consider too how the descriptions in the Psalms that betray the cold misrepresentations of the Law by portraying it as desirable precious, an idea echoed by Paul in Romans. Also, in Psalm 31 and 51, we find David experiencing forgiveness from the Lord independent of sacrifice. Some may try to claim that before Jesus forgiveness and righteousness was based on obedience and ritual, but that is clearly not the case. Unfortunately, we have inherited a poor hermeneutic and opinion of what is wrong with what is inaccurately called 'the Old Testament' from those who were genuinely trying to preserve the Gospel. But in their zeal, they erred. And as a result, many discussions on the nature and purpose of the Law seem to be overly simplistic, missing its more complicated role and function.

In this book, I want to explore the Law's origin and nature to help us better understand its purpose so that we can have greater clarity as to how it functions as covenant obligations. A Christian's theology matters because truth matters. God is a God of truth, and love rejoices in the

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 5:5,10

<sup>3</sup> 1Cor 11:30

<sup>4</sup> Heb 12:7

truth.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, we should pursue the truth. We should seek to see the Law, not according to caricatures painted by our spiritual forefathers, but according to what God says about it. And on top of the pursuit of truth, is the glory and honour of God. Because the Law is a revelation of who God is, to deride the Law is a slight on His character. This is why 1 John, says that obeying the Law is how we show our love for our creator, the Lawgiver.<sup>6</sup>

It is my hope that by the end of this book, you would have thought biblically, meaningfully and deeply about the Law of God. I also hope that you will go away with a fresh appreciation of the goodness of the Law, and an understanding of why David and Paul could speak so highly of it.

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<sup>5</sup> 1Cor 13:6

<sup>6</sup> 1Jn 5:2