

Why Some Christian Movements Avoid the Law of God

Historically there have been many expressions of Christianity that have held less than a scriptural view of the Law of God. In this article, the Law of God refers to the Ten Commandments given to Moses (Ex. 20) and the civic laws that apply these commandments as case law in society. (For a brief example: Exodus 20 reveals the Ten Commandments and Exodus 21-23 apply these commandments as civic laws.)

Since there are 613 civic laws, hermeneutically we need to discern which ones were only for the nation of Israel during Moses' time period. We also need to know how the application and penalty for breaking these commandments have been modified in the New Covenant. (We furthermore need to understand the fact that the ceremonial law has been done away with after the death and resurrection of Christ. Read Hebrews 10.)

I contend that the Ten Commandments are still in effect in this present time because said commandments are rooted in the created order since they reflect the holiness and character of God. Hence, they are trans-historical, multi-generational and trans-cultural.

This is why each of the Ten Commandments had been restated in the Gospels and the Epistles numerous times as a standard both for personal holiness and for civil law.

In this day, many evangelical teachers and groups have disregarded and or misinterpreted the purpose of the Law of God. Groups that avoid or undermine the law do so at their own peril!

For example, the evangelical church that avoids the 613 civic laws has no specific biblical text that deals with the matter of abortion. Exodus 21:22-25 clearly illustrates that God

considers an unborn child a living person and grants them the full rights and protections granted other persons. Of course there are other texts that can demonstrate the pro-life position—however they are not as direct as this case law passage in Exodus.

There are many other laws necessary to understand, especially if the church is serious regarding the application of the gospel in the various spheres of culture. Many Christian leaders flee from integrating the Law of God in their theological construct because its implications would obligate them to participate in the life of their community and nation.

I also believe that many believers are just plain lazy, and would rather focus their Bible reading to further their own personal well-being and not be bothered with the biblical implications for society. I don't know of one evangelical Christian who doesn't believe the Bible gives the church and family specific rights and ethics under God's kingdom jurisdiction. But most of these same believers have no biblical understanding regarding what the Word of God says regarding ethics in the political and economic realms!

Furthermore, it would be very difficult for anyone to prove from Scripture that believers should consign themselves to be continually ruled by secular humanists, atheists, communists and other antibiblical factions. If that were the case, then it behooves the church to integrate the law of God in its respective theological systems so it can apply it practically for human flourishing.

The following is a broad overview of Christian movements that have avoided the law of God in their theology:

1. The Roman Catholic Church. Historically, the . has embraced a view of natural law in regards to ethics that is a synthesis of both Athens and Jerusalem (Greek and Roman philosophy and the Bible) Thomas Aquinas, their greatest teacher—devoted his

life to combining theology with Aristotelian thought, leaving a lot of gaps regarding biblical law and ethics. If a person goes to a typical R.C. seminary to prepare for the priesthood, they will get a spoonful of theology along with a full-course meal replete with philosophy, sociology, anthropology and the like that serves as their main reference points for societal ethics (I have also studied many of these secular disciplines as part of my academic training but find them wanting compared to biblical ethics as found in the law of God).

2. The Evangelical Pietists. By Pietism, I am referring to the movement that de-emphasized doctrine and theology in favor of a personal relationship with Christ. This experience was quantified as a subjective inner consciousness with the presence of God. Augustus Franke and Jacob Spener made pietism as a movement popular in the 17th century among the Lutherans. It soon influenced many denominations and movements including the Moravians, Anabaptists and Methodists. Although pietism was originally a much-needed movement to bring balance to the dead, creedal, state-recognized Protestant church, extreme Pietism eventually produced individualistic Christians who used their faith to escape from the world instead of the biblical mandate to use the power of Christ to transform and engage the world (John 17:15, Acts 1:8,9; Gen. 1:28, Matt. 5:13-16, 28:19,20). Those in this camp usually view the moral law of God in a spiritual way as a personal standard of holiness rather than also viewing it as a standard for civil society.

3. The Word of Faith Movement. I will forever be indebted to the teachings of men like Kenneth Hagin, who had a real understanding of divine healing and faith. However, I have heard brother Hagin say that he did not spend much time reading the Old Testament but focused on the New Testament because the New Testament was founded upon better promises. It is not really what the Word of Faith movement taught that is a problem—it is what it did not teach that left it lacking in

regards to preparing the church to transform cities. By embracing the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:26-28, those like myself who once embraced the WOF movement have learned to expand the use of our faith to include prosperity for human flourishing in communities and beyond—not just for individuals. Those with a theology that neglects the first testament will never understand the law of God.

4. The Hyper-Grace Movement. The hyper-grace movement popularized by prominent teachers like Joseph Prince has done a lot of good for those under the onerous burden of works and condemnation. However, their teachings tend to dismiss the law of God as not applicable for the church. There are several problems with this: One, the Holy Spirit may write the law of God on a believer's heart—but we need the written moral law to bring a consciousness of it to us to convict us of sin (Rom. 3:31, 7:7).

One lady wrote to me recently and said that we do not need the written law of God—all we need is love. The weakness of this argument is obvious—how do you define love without the moral law of God? Without the biblical framework, a person's definition of love can include pedophilia, bestiality or polygamy! Secondly, because teachers in this camp focus more on individual prosperity and blessing, they neglect the primary calling of the believers—which is to fulfill the Cultural Mandate (Gen. 1:26-28). The law of God is absolutely needed according to Saint Paul (1 Tim. 1: 8-11) especially to restrain the sin of the ungodly in a civil society.

5. The Dispensational Fundamentalist Movement. The Fundamentalists came to prominence during their battle against the modernists in the beginning of the 20th century. These generally had a hyper-pre-millennial, dispensational view regarding the Scripture. The dispensationalists of that ilk generally regarded the kingdom age as coming only when Jesus bodily returned and reigned for 1,000 years on the earth (in Jerusalem). This led them by and large to separate the gospel

from the kingdom, to disengage from culture and to fervently preach about the rapture. They generally neglected the first covenant—especially the application of the law of God in society, since they had no vision for societal transformation. Prominent study Bibles that codified their belief system were the Schofield, Dakes and Ryrie study Bibles.

6. Various Pentecostal movements. Generally speaking, the various Pentecostal movements of the 20th century focused more on individual transformation and the use of the gift of the Spirit. These generally were fundamentalists who spoke in tongues—hence they basically had the same (non) view regarding the application of the law of God in civil society as those described in point five.

7. The Transformation Movement. Many if not most in the seven-mountain transformation movement of today rarely refer to the law of God as the standard of ethics for a culture. The problem with this is, without the moral law of God, there is no real reference point for what true biblical transformation should look like. Hence, it is common to preach transformation but not offer any explanation regarding the objective of said transformation and what it would look like in a community, city or nation. God tells us in Isaiah 2:2-4 that His view of transformation includes the nations coming to Him to learn His ways and His laws. Unless we adopt this view of transformation, our reference point for changing a community will only involve many souls getting saved (revival) that results in a quality of life shift (both very good and important things to work towards).

However, by what standard or by whose standard of ethics will nations be held accountable economically and politically? I contend that long-lasting systemic change will only come when the church agrees to work together towards the clear biblical standard of ethics. Without this, those preaching on transforming the mountains of culture will not be taken serious for much longer. Furthermore, without understanding

how the Ten Commandments and its 613 case laws can be applied in principle, how can we disciple present and future gatekeepers who will frame laws and systems for nations?

Joseph Mattera is an internationally known author, futurist, interpreter of culture and activist/theologian whose mission is to influence leaders who influence nations. He leads several organizations, including The United States Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (). He also has a blog on Charisma magazine called "The Pulse." To order one of his books or to subscribe to his weekly newsletter go to .