

Law and Vision

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Laws are promulgated to enforce someone's vision of what a society should look like.

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The question the people always ask is, "All right, we just had the Ten Commandments. Let me go into this long list of detailed statutes and so forth and why? And why there?"

laws form a vision. And the vision is how do I want this society to look? So what you do is you promulgate laws that either encourage behavior or discourage behavior based on what you want the society to look like.

Now there's a category error that a lot of people make and that is; confusing obedience to law with blessing. What a category error is is where you ascribe one thing to something else that it doesn't belong with. Obedience does not bring blessing. The thing that brings blessing is a relationship with God. Now, by gross disobedience, you can damage that relationship and, in that process, lose blessings, but understand that mere obedience to the law does not result in blessing. That's fundamental Christian doctrine too, which says you can't work your way into heaven. The only way you can get into heaven is with a relationship with a Messiah. That's because they're two different things. So lots of people think, "Well, if I'm really, really good, I'm going to get in there." Well, that's not the way it works. So, laws implement a vision. Blessings come from a relationship. Keeping those separate is useful.

Now, the other thing that laws do is they codify right and wrong. God's laws are very straightforward and very crisp and that bothers people, because people really like ambiguity and wiggle room. We would really like to be able to decide on the fly; well, is this okay or is that okay or whatever; when God says, "Yeah, do that or no, don't do that." So wiggle room is something we like and that's why we sort of chafe at God's laws.

So the vision that a set of laws implement or based on the history of the people. Israel's laws are based on the fact that they've been in slavery for 400 years. Notice that the first thing that gets talked about is how you deal with slaves. They're also based on God's understanding of human nature. I was listening to Ron Dart a couple of weeks ago, and he was saying God's laws are just like the laws of physics. Because they describe what human nature is. They're not arbitrary. They're not just something that God decided to do, just because. They're designed to create a society that is healthy, thriving, and free. That's what they're designed to do.

So the first thing we talk about is slavery. And your secular friends will get snarky about that - "Oh, yeah, tell me how I'm supposed to treat my slaves."

Well, the reason it's important is because Israel has just been enslaved. They have been on the wrong side of a power relationship. The question then is, when you're in power, how do you

behave, how do you treat people? so that you don't have people who are in the position you were in, but instead you have a healthy society.

The other thing about Israel's story is Israel's story is based on trust in God. God reaches into Egypt and takes his people out by his power without any help from them, quite frankly. And by the way, in Christian theology, that's salvation by grace, He just reaches in and does it, and then takes them through baptism - the Red Sea - and then brings them up on the other side, and that's where he gives them laws. So laws are not designed for salvation. They're designed for - how do we live after we've been saved?

Lots of people make the category error of conflating obedience with blessing. Obedience is for your own good. So if you never steal a car, you'll never go to jail for car theft. So obedience to the law is for your benefit.

Now, I want to shift gears from Israel to the United States. Because our laws are also based on a vision for society. And there's two competing visions. And those visions have been in competition since before the revolution. This is not something new. One vision is a Christian nation under God. The other view coming up from Greece through Hagle and all the philosophers: a nation governed by whatever men think is good. Of the two visions, they've been in conflict ever since the founding. The vision that made it into our founding documents is the Christian vision. All of the founders who put this together were Christians. Some Quakers and some were Baptist and some were Congregationalists, but they're all fundamentally steeped in the Bible. So the founding documents that we have are godly documents because we were a colony of religious refugees; just like The Israelites were a group of refugees from Egyptian slavery.

The United States was founded initially by colonialists who came here for the purpose of fleeing religious persecution. They demanded freedom of conscience. One of the things that they couldn't do when there was a state church, as in England or France or any place else, is they had to be in that church. You didn't have freedom of conscience.

The equality of opportunity, no aristocracy. One of Jefferson's quotes that I'm very fond of, he said it is not the case that some people were born with saddles and others were born with boots and spurs to ride them. The idea there is hereditary aristocracy is a no-no. In the phrase "all men are created equal," he's not talking about equal in talent or equal in ability or equal in anything else except equality before the law as opposed to being a hereditary aristocrat. That's what that phrase is designed to deal with.

The original colonists had a strong distrust of the government. I think it was Washington that said, "Government, like fire, is a dangerous servant and a fearful master." So limited government is part of our history.

So all of those things that I have just laid out made it into the Constitution, our founding documents.

Now the other vision is secular. It is collectivist. And then finally, it is statism. And the whole thing is run by human reason.

What you have there is whatever we think is right and we can get enough people to agree with. That's going to be the law. And one of the things that's going on right now is we have seen that infection run riot in our country over the last hundred years. And notice one of the things that's going on right now is the current administration is going through that stuff with a machete.

One of the things that the collectivists have done is they have created a strong executive and they've made that president very strong over time incrementally. Well, what's happened now is one of their enemies has taken control of that strong executive and is using all of those powers that the collectivists have established to destroy the collectivist project. That's what you're watching right now. And it's a fight to the death, quite frankly. Because it's rooted in two different visions of what kind of a society we're going to have,

Those two visions go back before the Founders. They go clear back to Greece and Egypt. Quite frankly, they're that old. But understand what kind of a conflict we have, and it's revolving around law because law is the mechanism that is used to implement a vision for society.

And you hear all the screams out there, and it's not just pigs who have been separated from the slop bucket. I mean, there's a lot of that. But it's also the destruction of a vision with these folks that they spent decades building up. That's a lot of this screaming that you're hearing. And again, as I say, a lot of it is pigs that have been separated from the slop bucket, That's going on too.

So I just wanted to put that into context for you because as we read the Torah portion you get all these laws and people's eyes glaze over and [they think], "Wait a minute I don't have any oxen why am I reading all this? I don't have any slaves why am I reading all this?" Because it's important. Because it forms the basis for the society that we originally formed after the Revolution. Understand, we've got two different visions if you will and they're in conflict.

The powerful thing about the vision that is against the Constitution is it appeals to the human intellect. How many times have you heard politicians say, "We're going to do it smarter." which is to say this is failed every time it's tried but we're going to do it smarter. It appeals to human hubris which is why it's never going away and it always has to be swatted down. But it has to be swatted down based on an understanding of what's going on. So the essence of the Torah and the essence of the Constitution is both of them limit - in law - what the powerful can do to the weak. If You read the Constitution, it is a limitation on government. Remember when Barack Obama said, "Well, it's a document of negative liberties, which means that limits what the government can do by design." So does the Torah, by design. It limits what the powerful can do to the weak.

Having said all that, don't confuse obedience to law with blessing. You can't earn blessings. Don't get me wrong. Obedience to God's Torah is enlightened self-interest. As I said, if you don't go around stealing cars, your chances of going to jail are pretty small. For car theft - you may go for something else, but you understand the principle. Blessing on the other hand comes

from a relationship. And what God says over and over and over again is who He is and that He will not share his position or worship with anything else. So, I'll say this very carefully, the blessings of God are what he thinks are good for you, not necessarily what you want. Very often, something will happen to you that makes you really grumpy and you will find out at some later time that that was actually a blessing. It's happened to me a lot. So here, the idea is God's blessings are given by the sovereign, and because they are blessings, He is giving it to someone He loves for that person's good. That's a blessing. Sometimes blessings get disguised, and that's just part of life.

How do you get this relationship with God? You ask for it. And again, that is Christianity 101. You ask Yeshua for His presence in your life.

So the way you get the blessing is you ask for it. Now once you've asked for it, you have come into a relationship with the God of the universe. There are some things that He doesn't like. If you practice the things that He doesn't like, His chances of blessing you are greatly diminished. We just read in Jeremiah, where the Israelites weren't releasing their Hebrews slaves on the year of release. And God finally just has it right up to here with them and says, "Fine, I'm going to release the sword, and I'm going to release famine." So God is a person who has a relationship with us, and just like any other relationship, one party to that relationship can make it go south. Now, God isn't going to make it go south. We would be the ones who make it go south, but let me give you some examples of the things that God doesn't like.

First thing He doesn't like is damaging his reputation. One of the things that Moses says on the mountain when God is ready to destroy Israel is, "Uh, wait a minute, If you do that, the nations will say you weren't able to do what it was you set out to do." And God relented. I had a friend who lived across the street from me - a strong Christian - refused to put a fish on his car. And the reason he refused to put a fish on a car is he had kind of a heavy foot. And he didn't want to be caught speeding with a fish on his car. He didn't say it this way, but the way I would say it is, "Well, if you profess to be a Christian and follow God, how come you're doing this kind of stuff?" And he decided he didn't want to take a chance on damaging God's reputation.

The next one is taking the relationship for granted. If you have a relationship with someone and you just sort of take it for granted, pretty soon the other person is going to start distancing himself from that relationship. So will God. He wants you to talk to him, pray with him.

Spiritual adultery, dabbling with other gods. He doesn't like that.

Oppression of the weak. You remember I just said earlier, both the United States Constitution and God's Torah say that the strong will not oppress the weak. Interestingly, my dear wife was in a Facebook yammer with an old friend of hers, who said, "This deportation, Torah says, you shall not oppress the stranger. So how come we're rounding up all these people and deporting them?" Well, there's another Torah principle. One law for the Sojourner and the Native. And if the Sojourner is violating the law, then removing the Sojourner from society is perfectly sound.

The next one is dishonesty, and that is characterized by unequal weights and measures. You have two sets of weights in your bag, and you use the heavier one when you're buying and the

light one when you're selling. That's specifically forbidden in the Torah. He doesn't like dishonesty.

Immorality. All sorts of laws having to do with moral behavior, mostly sexual. So He doesn't like immorality.

And then finally He doesn't like pride.

So as you're thinking about how you maintain a healthy relationship with your God understand two things: When you discover that you violated one of these things - and we all do - confess, repent, say you're sorry, try to do better next time. God understands repentance. Both Old Testament and New Testament. He understands it just perfectly. So repentance is always available to you. But understand that obeying the law is in your best interest. Doesn't earn you any brownie points. God is not going to pat you on the head and just say, "Wow, you didn't steal anything today, alright!" That's not gonna happen. That's for your benefit. The thing that gets you God's blessing is a relationship with him. And just like any other relationship, you've got to work on it. That's not something that you can run on automatic pilot. As you go out, recognize the difference between those two concepts. And work on them both.