

The Purpose of the Law

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight,
since through the law comes knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20).

The Bible could not be more clear on this subject. 'By works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight.' God will not declare any person righteous on the basis of his obedience to the law. Yet many people presume that they will be alright at the end if they had generally lived a good life.

This is fatal mistake. The law was not given to save us. Not a single person will ever be justified by the works of the law. You and I will not be justified by the law either. And that for a very simple reason: 'since through the law there comes knowledge of sin.'

The law is upright; our moral record is not. The law is a straight ruler; our life is a crooked line. The ruler cannot make it straight, it simply shows that it is not. The law does not justify us, it simply shows that we have failed to abide by God's moral standards, and as such it can only convict and condemn us.

The law is like a mirror. Looking in the mirror of God's law we see our faces stained and dirty with sin. In one way or another we have broken every one of the Ten Commandments. We have disobeyed God in so many different ways. We did not always love God with all our heart, nor give him thanks and glorify him as we should. We have placed our will and our interests before him, and we have desired wealth, health and prosperity more than God himself. We have been disobedient to our parents, we have not always been pure, honest, kind and truthful.

God's verdict on the entire world is final: 'None is righteous, no, not one' (Romans 3:10). That includes us. God says that we are not righteous. He gave the law 'so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God' (Romans 3:19). We have no excuses; we better shut our mouth and hang our head in shame before him.

That is as far as the law can take us. The law cannot cleanse us, just as a man cannot clean his face with a mirror. Nonetheless the mirror would have served a very useful purpose if the man, having realized his problem, washes his face with soap and water. In the same way, God's law is indispensable to persuade us of our greatest spiritual need. The law convicts us of sin, it reveals our guilt and it threatens us with everlasting punishment. Well might we feel terrified by the law of God!

Yet we should not despair. Conscious of our sin, we should flee to God, without any pretension of personal merit, and humbly plea for mercy. We can take heart and come to the God whose law we have broken, for we know that he 'sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law' (Galatians 4:4-5). God sent Jesus to do for us what the law could never do; he came to redeem and free us from sin.

Our spiritual journey begins at mount Sinai. There we tremble in fear amid the thunders and fire of God's law. We run away in search for shelter and salvation, and by God's grace, we are led to Golgotha, to the feet of the cross. There, in Christ alone, we find our justification.