

### **Grace Parenting -- The Use of the Law**

“...if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.” ~ Romans 7:7b

“If your law had not been my delight,  
I would have perished in my affliction.” ~ Psalm 119:92

Recently we’ve been focused on grace, which was defined as the “unmerited favor of God.” By way of comparison, what are some word associations that arise when we think of God’s law?

Typically we think of the law as mainly focused on prohibition -- that is, it tells us what *not* to do. Yet with the prohibition, there is also often an explicit or implied instruction (“two-sided rule”, from Ryken, Written in Stone). Examples of this pairing from biblical and secular law:

- Eph. 4:29 --
- Col 3:5-14 --
- Do not operate a vehicle without wearing a seatbelt

Hopefully we can acknowledge with the Psalmist that God’s law is good (even lovable! Psalm 119). However, when the law is applied, it certainly doesn’t always feel like it is “good” (to us or our children). Given that salvation is *by grace alone* (and not obedience to the law), what role does the law play?

**Three uses of God’s law** (Ryken, citing John Calvin):

Map -- more than just giving prohibitions, God’s law helps us understand what is pleasing to him, and what is required of us. It points us toward what is good and guides our conduct.

Muzzle -- God’s law also serves to encourage restraint from certain patterns of behavior (for individuals and society as a whole). Knowledge of God and his law -- including its threats and punishments -- can deter sin.

Mirror -- it reveals to us our complete inability to live without fault. Because we cannot keep God’s law, it exposes our sin and our utter need for a savior.

**Responses to being confronted with the truth of God's law:**

1. We ignore or deny truth, seeking instead affirmation apart from God's standard of conduct.  
(Read 1 John 1:8-10.)
  - a. Do you notice this tendency in yourself/your children? What is driving this response?
  - b. What warnings or commands are given? What promises or hope do we see?
  - c. How can the passage encourage us toward repentance?
  
2. The law convicts, but we try to cover it up or point to our good works as equalizers.  
(Remember the story of David's sin with Bathsheba from 2 Samuel 11; Read James 2:8-11 and Romans 3:21-24.)
  - a. Do you notice this tendency in yourself/your children? What is driving this response?
  - b. What warnings or commands are given? What promises or hope do we see?
  - c. How can the passage encourage us toward repentance?
  
3. The law convicts, but we shift blame or seek to focus on the faults of others.  
(Remember Adam's blame of Eve in Genesis 3; Read Matthew 7:1-5.)
  - a. Do you notice this tendency in yourself/your children? What is driving this response?
  - b. What warnings or commands are given? What promises or hope do we see?
  - c. How can the passage encourage us toward repentance?
  
4. The law convicts, but our sin drives us to despair and causes us to run *from* God.  
(Remember Adam and Eve hiding from God in Genesis 3; Read Romans 7:18-25.)
  - a. Do you notice this tendency in yourself/your child(ren)? What is driving this response?
  - b. What warnings or commands are given? What promises or hope do we see?
  - c. How can the passage encourage us toward repentance?

5. The law convicts, we repent and run *to* God.  
(Remember Nathan's confrontation of David's sin in 2 Samuel 12 and David's repentance in Psalm 51; Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-11.)
  - a. Do you notice this tendency in yourself/your children? What is driving this response?
  - b. What warnings or commands are given? What promises or hope do we see?
  - c. How can the passage encourage us toward repentance?

\*\* We must remember here that it is *through the grace of God* we experience conviction, and it is by the grace of God that we move toward repentance and reconciliation. The use of the law as a hammer rather than a mirror does not help to communicate the good news of the gospel or draw the recipient to Christ.\*\*

*"Your children need God's law, but you cannot ask the law to do what only grace can accomplish."*

*~ Paul Tripp (Parenting, pp.45)*

#### **Application Questions / Next Steps --**

1. If our use of the law were measured on a continuum (with legalism at one end and lawlessness at the other), what has the mode of operation been for you lately? For your household? What would your children say? What might be standing in the way of seeing God as both gracious in his law and full of grace?
2. What is your first response to being confronted with God's law? What truths about God and his word can remind you of the value of repentance and reconciliation? Read and remember the truth of Romans 8:1-4.
3. Spend some time this week examining David's testimony of experiencing God's forgiveness (Psalm 32 -- on scripture sheet). Which of David's statements resonate with you? How can you grow in appreciating the "grace of conviction" as you learn from this Psalm?
4. Spend some time in prayer, asking God to use the mirror of His law to bring true conviction of sin and hearts of repentance to you and to your children. As the Spirit leads, confess your sin to God, and be assured of the grace of forgiveness through the blood of Christ.

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"It is only in the mirror of God's Word that you see yourself accurately, and only in his grace that you find help for what you see. ... Empowered by the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, [God's Word] is the universe's most accurate mirror. Stand in front of it and you will see yourself as you really are. ... And here's the good news. You don't need to be afraid of all the dark things ... which Scripture reveals about you, because all of those dark things have been covered by and defeated by the powerful grace that is yours in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus."

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