

TEACHING GOAL

To study the function of God's law in the lives of unregenerate people.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

- Q. What did God at first reveal to man for the rule of his obedience?
- A. The rule that God at first revealed to man for his obedience, was the moral law.
- Q. Where is the moral law summarily comprehended?
- A. The moral law is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments.
- S.C. 40-41, L.C. 95-96, W.C. of F. XIX, Savoy 19, Young 79

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: Romans 7:7-13

Support Passages: Romans 2:14-15, Acts 24:24-25, Matthew 14:1-10, I Timothy 1:9-10, Galatians 3:24, Romans 1:20, Galatians 3:10

BIBLE STORY

Acts 24: Felix became frightened as Paul spoke to him of the Law of God.

.MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

"So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith." (Galatians 3:24, ESV)

APPLICATION

How grateful we should be to God for providing his perfect Law to teach us our need for Christ and how thankful we should be to Christ for fulfilling His Law. This provides the strongest possible motive for obedience.

SUMMARY

One of the interesting facets of mankind is their propensity for laws to govern their lives. Paul writes that the Gentiles instinctively do the things of the Law of God even though they have had little or no exposure to it.¹ God chose to give His Law to the Hebrew nation. Hammurabi (1728-1686 B.C.), on the other hand, was not a godly man. Being a Gentile he none-the-less produced a code that included "nearly three hundred paragraphs of legal provisions touching commercial, social, domestic and moral life."² His code parallels the last six commandments of the biblical Decalog but the punishments are excessive and ungodly. He worshipped the Babylonian gods Marduk, Tiamat, Apsu, etc., thus he practiced polytheism as did all except Israel or those to whom YAHWEH chose to reveal Himself.

We mention Hammurabi because this example of heathen legal systems is available for all to see at the Louvre in Paris. It consists of inscriptions on a black diorite Stella. Many more examples of legal systems can be cited which serve to prove Paul's assertion that Gentiles do the things of the Law instinctively. However comprehensive such legal systems may be, they do not lead to Christ. They lead only to false worship and in the end serve to promote evil. It is certainly true that anarchy is evil but one wonders, sometimes, which is worse, anarchy or humanistic ungodly laws. Only the moral Law of YAHWEH promotes good and prevents anarchy. All other legal systems lead to famine, repression, tyranny and the persecution of God's people.

In the case of Felix, the Law of YAHWEH produced terror. We read that Paul spoke to Felix of "righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come,"³ and he became frightened. Yet this did not produce repentance and faith in Christ. God's Law leads to Christ but much more is needed to produce saving faith, namely such things as conversion and regeneration. Notice that Felix typically wanted a bribe!⁴

In the case of Paul the Law of YAHWEH produced saving faith.⁵ In addition, God converted Paul on the road to Damascus where Paul, like Felix, was frightened and those with him as well.⁶ The Law, then, obviously awakens the conscience and drives the individual to Christ but it cannot justify or save. The Law is good and perfect but its purpose is other than salvation. Salvation is of the Lord!

Perhaps it would be well take note of the word *guardian* in Paul's letter to the church in Galatia, "So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian." (Galatians 3:24-25, ESV) Older versions translate the Greek original as *schoolmaster* or *tutor*, the idea being that the Law teaches us our need for salvation through Christ. However the translation *guardian* is closer to the meaning of the original Greek word in Paul's day. Thus we would understand that humankind remains under the authority of the Law functioning as a guardian until God declares by sending his Son, that it has come of age.⁷

Felix was left without an excuse after his encounter with God's Law. The things that God created, even without the Law, leave the individual without excuse.⁸ Herod's conscience was certainly troubled by God's Law as evidenced by his imprisonment of John following John's rebuke of his sin with Herodias.⁹ He did not repent, however, and in the end murdered John. He was left utterly inexcusable. Thus we see the effect of the Law of God on people that are unregenerate. It leaves one without excuse, it leads to Christ, it arouses the conscience, but it cannot save.

Praise God that He converts and enables some to believe and obey. We should thank God for this with obedience to His gracious commandments.

¹ Romans 2:14-15

² Jack Finnegan, *Light From The Ancient Past*, Princeton University Press, N.J., 1963, p59.

³ Acts 24:25

⁴ Acts 24:26

⁵ I Timothy 1:12-17

⁶ Acts 26:13-15

⁷ Arndt, W., Gingrich, F. W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (1996, c1979). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature : A translation and adaption of the fourth revised and augmented edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Worterbuch zu den Schrift en des Neuen Testaments und der ubrigen urchristlichen Literatur* (603). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁸ Romans 1:20

⁹ Matthew 14:3-5