

THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

C. O. Rosenius (1816-1868)

“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”

—Romans 5:20

NOTHING else helps! Man can never be made to pay the right homage to the Taker-away of his sins if he is not driven and compelled by the sin and the Law. God is reconciled. He says: “I will not remember thy sins” (Isa 43:25). His merciful heart burns with love towards all those He has bought so dearly. But they cannot be saved, they cannot be made to flee to the cities of refuge, unless they are chased by the avenger of blood. Therefore He must always plague, frighten, and exhaust us with the commandments and judgments of the Law. As Joseph burned with love when his brothers came to Egypt, and immediately decided to do good to them, though via his interpreter he still “spake roughly” (Gen 42:7) to them, and let his men bind and imprison, frighten and grieve them in order to make their hard hearts soft, so also the Lord must frighten, imprison, compel, and grieve us through His servant and interpreter, Moses. “But he does not grieve willingly the children of men” (Lam 3:33). “What things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the Law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom 3:19)—in order that sin may abound.

In Romans 7 the apostle shows how the abundance of sin is brought about by the Law. That is, the Law does not only show us the sin as in a mirror, but also—by the prohibition—rouses the slumbering sin to action and fight, in order that it shall not lie hidden, and the sinner think himself free from sin. “For I was alive without the law once, and then sin was dead: But when the commandment came, sin revived and wrought in me all manner of concupiscence [excessive desire].” And immediately the sinner is miserable and wretched, the sinner who before was so self-satisfied, safe, proud, and rich in virtues, is now miserable and wretched, powerless and perplexed, so that the whole world becomes too narrow for him. Now the life in sin, so dear before, becomes bitter, the foreign country howling, the Father’s house sweet, yes, even a place as a servant there (Luk 15:11ff)! Oh what a lot of good comes out of this miserable abundance of sin! And this was not brought about by lawlessness, but by the Law. For this purpose the Law is good and not something to make the human being pious. Once and for all, please notice and remember that the Scriptures say: “Moreover the law entered that sin might *abound*.” Notice it does not say “be overcome,” but “abound”! So that at the very moment you want to become better, you become worse. When you want to behave well and be holy, then you are anything but good—sin abounds. You want to love God, then you

feel only hatred, at least an insufferable coldness in your heart. You want to be mild and meek, then you boil with bitterness. You want to be clean in thoughts and heart, then all manner of concupiscence is wrought in you (Rom 7:8). You want to be contrite and humble, then you are hard as stone, stiff-necked, and full of pride. Paul says: that “the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death” (Rom 7:10); that “sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.” Such are the right effects of the Law when it hits the heart.

But now it becomes all too absurd and breakneck to receive grace in the middle of such a misery of sin. Therefore, the soul turns to all sides and seeks other ways out. If the Law has not hit the sinner deeply enough, he can find relief and consolation in his own deeds, his repentance, his prayers, his improvement, his victory over certain sins, his new religious life.

In that way a Pharisee is molded. One takes to other deeds, charity work, religious activities. Another seeks his salvation in penances, tears, prayers, self-denial, humbleness, dying to this world. A third can subdue the trouble aroused by occupying his head with spiritual studies, collecting knowledge, clear and beautiful knowledge, without himself really owning and exercising what the knowledge contains, etc.

Now is the time for the punishing office of the Spirit. The Spirit will punish all these. What for?—for “sin, because they believe not on me” (Joh 16:9). The Spirit will reveal that when at last they have done all that any mortal has done; when they have repented of their sins so much that they could have cried blood; when they have been down on their knees in prayer day and night; when they have mortified their flesh in the most severe way, and have resisted unto blood, striving against sin (Heb 12:4); when they have forbidden their eyes to see and their ears to hear and their tongue to speak anything vain; when they have forbidden their mouths to taste and the whole of their being to enjoy any superfluous luxuries; when they have given their possessions to the poor, and have used all the moments of their lives for the welfare of their neighbors; when they have prophesied in the name of Jesus and done many wonderful works in His name—then the Lord with the wounds in His hands and His side will condemn them and say: “Depart from me, ye that work iniquity” for sin, because ye did not believe on Me (see Mat 7:23).

The Spirit will reveal that with all this holiness of theirs they will be thrown into the utmost darkness, because they are not clad in the wedding garment consisting of the righteousness of Christ. They have not had their only consolation in the blood of the Saviour on Golgotha. They have not bartered with Him, i.e., they have not accepted His righteousness in the way He has taken their sins on Him (2Co 5:21). And for once mark it, dear soul, that if His deeds are not yours, if His righteousness, His prayers, His sufferings and death are not yours, then you are eternally lost.



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