

## The "Lawful" Use Of The Law

*"But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully, as knowing this, that law is not made for a righteous man but for the lawless and the unruly ..."* (1 Tim. 1:8f).

Some teachers at Ephesus, having swerved from a pure heart, good conscience and unfeigned faith, had turned aside to vain talking. They desired to be teachers of the law, although they understood neither what they said, nor whereof they confidently affirmed.

The apostle did not mean to disparage the law; thus his statement *"we know that the law is good if a man use it lawfully."* One might be disposed to conclude from this that Paul indicated his brethren were still under the law. To so conclude would be false as is evident from Paul's prolific writings on this subject elsewhere. When one reads, and digests, Paul's arguments in Romans 7, Galatians 4, Ephesians 2, Hebrews 8 and Second Corinthians 3, it is transparently clear the apostle believed and taught that the law had been nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14). What then did the apostle have in mind when he wrote, *"We know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully"*?

After making this statement he proceeded to give a series of four couples followed by six individual items, all of which brings condemnation to those guilty of such practice. There is an added thought when the apostle said, *"We know that the law is good."* Our translation has *"the,"* a definite article, before *"law"* implying he spoke of that which Moses gave. When he addressed further lawlessness he adds, *"knowing this that law is not made for a righteous man, but for the covetous and unruly ..."* In this instance the definite article is absent. Was this an intended distinction by the apostle? Whether it was or wasn't, it remains true that the law is good, IF USED LAWFULLY; TRUE that law, all law, is not made for the righteous man but for the lawless and unruly.

Now consider those for whom the law, all law, is intended: *"the lawless and unruly, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for abusers of themselves with men, for men stealers, for liars, for false swearers"* (1 Tim. 1:9-10). It is sad, yet true, that many of these above items are regarded as archaic and some of them are being expunged from civil law as speedily as lawmakers can push them through the necessary channels. Witness: laws against prostitution, homosexuals, yes and even slayers of children (abortion) are being eradicated from law in state after state and nation after nation. Still there is a higher law human hands cannot touch and from which such law

these items will never be erased and of which violation all some someday give account.

Paul makes a significant statement which helps explain in what way the law may be used "lawfully." He said, "*And if there be any other thing contrary to the sound doctrine; according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God which was committed to my trust*" (1 Tim. 1:10f). This statement explains how "*the law is good*" -- how to use it "lawfully." Whatever the law taught has to be modified by that which the gospel teaches for the gospel is "*sound doctrine*;" the final dispenser of things which are right and wrong; that which is lawful. If the gospel modifies or omits anything from the law (which it does: Illustrations, Sabbath keeping deleted, Col. 2:16; divorce and remarriage for any cause, altered to one cause: fornication, Matt. 19:9); then the gospel is the standard. Use the law as defined and modified by the gospel and one uses it lawfully and in such use of it, it is good. Remember: should one seek to be justified by the law (or by perfect law keeping) is to use the law unlawfully. Please read Galatians 3:10-14.

Jim McDonald