

If Christians are to be salt and light by their words as well as their example, are their words to be words of the gospel only -- the good news of God's salvation through the redemptive work of Christ? Or are their words to be words of the Law of God as well?

If the proclamation of the gospel of God requires the previous knowledge of the Law of God, so that human beings will know they are guilty, condemned sinners in need of salvation from sin, they Christians must speak the words of the Law of God as well as those of the gospel of God, for by the Law is the knowledge of sin.

And human beings must be reminded of what God wrote on their hearts at their creation, so that they will realize that violations of the Law of God are sins against God, and deserve divine punishment. In this way the Law of God may be a persuasive means to restrain them from fuller expressions of their depravity than would occur without that restraint. But if human beings break through this net of persuasive restraint and openly violate the Law of God in such a way as to harm their fellow human beings, then Christians have a special obligation to urge the implementation of whatever just laws are needful to forcibly restrain such lawbreakers, including the use of appropriate force and equitable penalties.

If we refuse to struggle against the development of evil in the world lest we seem to fight against the Lord's own word and delay the Coming of our Lord, we need to realize a second great truth. Although the Lord has indeed predicted that the world will grow increasingly wicked, this is not directed to us as the rule of our obedience! This is what will be, not what should be. The rule of our obedience is not the Plan of God, but the Law of God.

The Plan (or Decree) of God concerns the entire scope of history: what has been, what is, and what will be. It is not directed to man as a rule of obedience; and therefore man cannot disobey it.

The Law of God concerns what ought to be. It informs human beings what they should and should not be and do, both in their relationship to God and in their relationships to their fellow humans. The Law of God is the Will of God directed to man's obedience in any age; and therefore man can disobey it and sin.

The rule of our obedience, then, is not God's revelation of what is going to happen, but rather God's revelation of what He wants us to be and to do, as expressed in His Law.

Since God is sovereign and almighty, whatever He has decreed will surely come to pass. He will do all His good pleasure; and man will surely fulfill God's decree, whether he wishes to or not.

But whatever God has commanded man to obey, man has the ability to disobey, even though he knows he ought to obey. Man has the ability to sin!

Man cannot disobey the Plan of God, since it is not addressed to him as a rule of obedience. Man is not commanded to obey God's Decrees. On the other hand, man can disobey the Law of God, since it is addressed to him as a rule of obedience. Man is commanded to obey God's Law.

To illustrate this distinction between the Plan of God and the Law of God, let us note two quite different scriptural concepts.