

for driving violations, or having to go back to driver's school, or having their licenses suspended; or when drivers who have had one drink too many think about the possibility of losing their license or spending a term in prison; do these considerations deter them from driving in a manner that endangers their own lives or the lives and property of their fellow citizens? For most drivers they do! In such cases, the laws and their penalties do operate to discourage them from being bad drivers, and to encourage them to be good drivers.

We can legislate morality in the sense of outward obedience to law; and we can legislate against immorality and restrain a certain amount of wrongdoing.

What can laws and penalties accomplish? They can accomplish quite a bit!

They cannot make sinful people good on the inside

They cannot make sinful people do things from a good motive

They can influence sinful people not to harm one another externally

They can influence sinful people to cooperate with one another so as to minimize the frictions of life

They can influence sinful people to live externally peaceful, orderly, and just lives

How can laws secure external morality? Laws and penalties cannot prevent all immorality, and cannot influence people perfectly in a positive direction, but in a society where laws are just, where they are enforced by people who are themselves subject to the same laws, and where penalties are assessed fairly and executed speedily, a great deal of immorality is restrained and a great deal of external morality is secured.

How then shall we answer the cliché, "You can't legislate morality"? We can state that the cliché is true if we are speaking of producing internal morality and extinguishing internal immorality by means of laws and penalties. But we can also state that the cliché is false if we are speaking of securing a large degree of external morality and restraining a large degree of external immorality by means of laws and penalties.

This brings us to the second criticism, which some Christians make, namely, "No matter how much morality you impose upon a man, you can't change his character. So why try the impossible?" This is perfectly true. But as Christians we don't expect laws and penalties to produce internal morality and to extinguish internal immorality; we know that only the gospel and the new birth and the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification can do that.

Nevertheless as Christians we do expect laws and penalties to help make our society as externally moral as possible, so that the greatest amount of sin and the evils it produces will be as restrained as possible in a sinful world.

But now, leaving these criticisms behind, we must ask, What will this emphasis on the securing of external morality by means of laws and penalties accomplish?