

third use of the law

Third use of the law is a concept in Reformed theology that plays a critical role in understanding the relationship between God's law and the Christian life. The term refers to the use of the moral law as a guide for believers after they have been justified by faith. This article will delve into the intricacies of the third use of the law, its theological significance, and its application in the life of a Christian.

Understanding the Three Uses of the Law

To fully grasp the third use of the law, it is essential first to understand the three uses of the law as articulated by Reformed theologians. These uses are:

1. **The Civil Use:** This use of the law serves as a restraint on evil and promotes order in society. It is intended for all people, guiding them toward moral behavior.
2. **The Theological Use:** This use highlights the sinfulness of humanity and points individuals to their need for grace. It acts as a mirror that reflects our shortcomings and leads us to Christ for salvation.
3. **The Third Use:** This use is specifically for believers, guiding them in their sanctification and helping them live according to God's will.

The Third Use of the Law Explained

The third use of the law is primarily concerned with how Christians should live after they have received salvation. It emphasizes that while believers are not saved by the law, they are called to follow it as a response to God's grace. This use of the law serves several purposes:

1. Guidance for Holy Living

The third use of the law provides a moral framework for believers. It helps them discern right from wrong and encourages them to pursue a life that is pleasing to God. The law is not merely a set of rules but a reflection of God's character and will. By adhering to it, Christians can grow in their relationship with God.

2. A Tool for Sanctification

Sanctification is the process by which believers are made holy through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The third use of the law acts as a catalyst for this process, revealing areas in which believers need to grow. Through the law, Christians are reminded of their dependence on God's grace and are motivated to pursue righteousness.

3. Encouragement and Accountability

The law also serves as a source of encouragement and accountability for believers. It provides clear standards for living and helps Christians hold one another accountable. When believers understand the third use of the law, they can support each other in their pursuit of holiness, fostering a community that reflects Christ's love.

Theological Implications of the Third Use of the Law

The third use of the law has significant theological implications, particularly concerning the nature of grace and obedience in the Christian life.

1. Grace Does Not Nullify the Law

One of the critical misunderstandings about grace is that it negates the need for the law. However, the third use of the law clarifies that grace empowers believers to obey the law rather than abolishing it. Paul writes in Romans 6:14, "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." This verse illustrates that living under grace enables believers to fulfill the law's requirements out of love for God.

2. The Law as a Teacher

The third use of the law positions the law as a teacher for Christians. In Galatians 3:24, Paul states, "So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith." This teaching role continues even after justification, guiding believers in their daily lives and helping them understand how to live out their faith.

3. The Relationship Between Justification and Sanctification

Understanding the third use of the law helps clarify the relationship between justification and sanctification. Justification is a one-time act where God declares a sinner righteous through faith in Christ. In contrast, sanctification is an ongoing process. The law serves as a means to guide believers in their sanctification, providing the moral compass necessary for spiritual growth.

Practical Applications of the Third Use of the Law

Understanding the third use of the law has practical implications for how Christians live their lives. Here are some ways believers can apply this understanding:

1. Daily Reflection on Scripture

Believers should prioritize daily reflection on Scripture to understand God's law better. This practice not only helps them internalize biblical principles but also fosters a deeper relationship with God.

2. Engaging in Community

Being part of a church community allows believers to hold each other accountable in their walk with Christ. Regular fellowship, Bible study, and discussions about the law can encourage members to apply its principles in their lives.

3. Prayer and Dependence on the Holy Spirit

Prayer is essential for seeking guidance and strength to obey God's law. Believers should continually pray for the Holy Spirit's help in applying the law in their lives, recognizing that they cannot do so in their strength.

4. Practicing Love and Mercy

The law culminates in love, as Jesus taught in Matthew 22:37-40. Believers should strive to embody love and mercy in their interactions with others, fulfilling the law's true intent.

Conclusion

The **third use of the law** is a vital aspect of the Christian faith, providing guidance, promoting sanctification, and reinforcing the relationship between grace and obedience. By understanding and applying this concept, believers can live in a way that honors God and reflects His character in their daily lives. Embracing the third use of the law enables Christians to grow in their faith, encouraging them to pursue holiness while being anchored in the grace of God.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the 'third use of the law' in Reformed theology?

The 'third use of the law' refers to the idea that God's moral law serves as a guide for Christian living, helping believers understand how to live in accordance with God's will after receiving grace.

How does the third use of the law differ from the first two uses?

The first use of the law acts as a mirror to show individuals their sinfulness, while the second use serves to restrain evil in society. The third use, however, provides guidance for believers on how to live a holy life.

Why is the third use of the law important for Christian ethics?

The third use of the law is important for Christian ethics because it emphasizes the role of the law in shaping moral behavior and guiding believers in their daily lives, promoting a life that reflects faith in action.

What are some biblical passages that support the third use of the law?

Biblical passages that support the third use of the law include Romans 12:1-2, where Paul urges believers to offer their bodies as living sacrifices, and James 1:22, which encourages believers to be doers of the word.

How do different Christian denominations interpret the third use of the law?

Interpretations of the third use of the law vary among denominations; for instance, Reformed traditions strongly advocate its importance, while other groups may emphasize grace over law, seeing it as less central to Christian living.

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