

To all godly Christians who feel and experience in their hearts a small spark or longing for divine grace and eternal salvation this precious passage is very comforting. For they know that God has kindled in their hearts this beginning of true godliness. He will further strengthen and help them in their great weakness to persevere in true faith unto the end [1 Peter 5:10]....

This doctrine of the Law is needed by believers in order that they may not make up a holiness and devotion of their own. Using God's Spirit as an excuse, they must not set up a self-chosen worship, without God's Word and command. For it is written:

“You shall not do according to...whatever is right in [your] own eyes,” but “be careful to obey all these words that I command you,” “you shall not add to it or take from it.” (Deuteronomy 12:8, 28, 32)

The doctrine of the Law is also necessary in and with the use of believers' good works. Otherwise, a person can easily imagine that his work and life are entirely pure and perfect. But God's Law prescribes good works to believers in this way: it shows and indicates at the same time, as in a mirror, that in this life works are still imperfect and impure in us. So we must say with the beloved Paul, “I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted” [1 Corinthians 4:4]. So Paul, when encouraging the regenerate to do good works, clearly presents to them the Ten Commandments (Romans 13:9). He recognizes from the Law that his good works are imperfect and impure (Romans 7:7–13). And David declares:

I will run in the way of Your commandments. (Psalm 119:32)

[But] enter not into judgment with Your servant, for no one living is righteous before You. (Psalm 143:2)

Now, a person who is physically dead cannot from his own powers prepare or make himself come back to life again. So the person who is spiritually dead in sins cannot by his own strength make or apply himself to acquire spiritual and heavenly righteousness and life. This is true unless he is delivered and brought to life by God's Son from the death of sin.

The Scriptures deny to the intellect, heart, and will of the natural man all readiness, skill, capacity, and ability to think, to understand, to be able to do, to begin, to will, to undertake, to act, to work, or to agree to work anything good and right in spiritual things from himself.

Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God. (2 Corinthians 3:5)

Together they have become worthless. (Romans 3:12)

My word finds no place in you. (John 8:37)

The darkness has not overcome it [the light]. (John 1:5)

“The natural person does not accept [or, as the Greek word properly signifies, grasps not, comprehends not, accepts not] the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:14). This means he is not capable of spiritual things. For they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them. Much less will he truly believe the Gospel or agree with it and regard it as truth.

For the mind that is set on the flesh [or the mind of the natural man] is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. (Romans 8:7)

In a word, what God's Son says remains eternally true, “For apart from Me you can do nothing” [John 15:5].

Paul says, “For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” [Philippians 2:13].

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