

## Endorsements

With clarity, courage, and deep confessional awareness, David Mitzenmacher offers a much-needed retrieval of the second use of God’s moral law—a doctrine too often neglected in modern evangelicalism, and especially within our Baptist tradition. This book marks a significant step forward in the maturation of Baptist political theology, demonstrating that Baptists need not choose between gospel centrality and moral clarity, nor between grace and public responsibility. Rooted in Reformed orthodoxy and driven by pastoral concern, Mitzenmacher reminds us that the law of God is not merely for the regenerate heart—it is also for the restraint of evil, the ordering of society, and the common good. In an age that calls evil good and good evil, this book is a gift to Baptists who are ready to think seriously and biblically about law, justice, and Christian public witness.

—Andrew T. Walker

Associate Professor of Christian Ethics and Public Theology  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

*The Law for the Lawless* lucidly argues that God intends for His Law to restrain evil in all spheres of life. This teaching, presumed in earlier times among more noble generations, is mostly absent from today’s pulpits. The by-product of the absence is a black freezing ocean of calamity. As waters cover the sea, lawlessness now covers the land. Civilization, deliriously gasping for air, is drowning underneath. Thankfully, this book is a rescue mission, offering a lamp, glowing with application, to direct us to the solid ground of ordered freedom.

—Jacob Reaume

Senior Pastor  
Trinity Bible Chapel

Amidst the numerous debates and controversies within the church, the civil use of the law as an external restraint on sin and a guide towards goodness has been completely neglected and overlooked by modern Christians. Many of today’s errors stem from a misunderstanding or failure to apply God’s law properly. In this age of chaos, we not only need the good news of God’s grace but also need to return to this God who graciously reveals

His moral law in the Decalogue so that we don't live rudderless and unsure of how to please our Creator. I'm excited about this volume and believe it will benefit any pastor or church that undertakes to reach it. *Tolle lege!*

—Alex Kocman

**Director of Communication and Engagement**

**ABWE**

**Author of *Striving for the Faith: Living a Life on Mission***

It has been rightly declared that a Christian ought to love the Law of God for it is a reflection of the Law-Giver, God Himself. If this book makes one thing exceptionally clear, it is that David Mitzenmacher loves the God of the Bible, for he loves the Law of God. And, without a doubt, we ought to desire to learn from pastor-theologians who clearly love the Lord and His Word. In an age of liberalism disguised as Christianity, and antinomianism masquerading as grace, Mitzenmacher has blessed the church with a well-reasoned defense of the objective use of God's perfect and glorious Law in the home, church, and society. Read it and learn to love God's Law, to live by God's Law, and to proclaim God's Law.

—Jacob Tanner

**Pastor of Christ Keystone Church**

**Author of *Resist Tyrants, Obey God: The Life and Times of John Knox***

For many Christians today, the word law carries a negative connotation, often seen as being at odds with the gospel. In *The Law for the Lawless*, David Mitzenmacher challenges this misconception by grounding his insights in the clear testimony of Scripture—particularly Paul's affirmation that "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (Romans 7:12). With clarity and care, Mitzenmacher shows that God's law is not only good but essential—for both believers and unbelievers—as a foundation for justice, order, and community well-being. This book serves as a timely reminder that even in a fallen world, God has graciously established a structure for human flourishing. By recovering the civil use of the law, *The Law for the Lawless* calls the church to restore the vital balance between law and gospel in an age that has largely rejected God's design.

—Randy Starkey

**Publications Director**

**Founders Ministries**

David Mitzenmacher has provided Evangelicals with a theological, biblical, and practical guide to live as salt and light in a world full of people that do not share their convictions. Not only does Mitzenmacher help the reader understand the instructive and corrective use of God's law in the home, the church, and society, but he also gives real-life direction for putting God's law to good use in these distinct relationships. I hope that many Christians will not only read this book, but that it will help them become the salt and light Christ has intended them to be.

—Marc Minter  
Senior Pastor  
First Baptist Church of Diana, TX

Few biblical subjects confound, confuse, and exasperate Christians more than that of the Law of God and its applicability today. In *The Law for the Lawless*, David Mitzenmacher has begun the challenging, yet desperately needed work of helping the Church recover the beauty, goodness, and applicability of God's Law for all of life, so that all might know Christ.

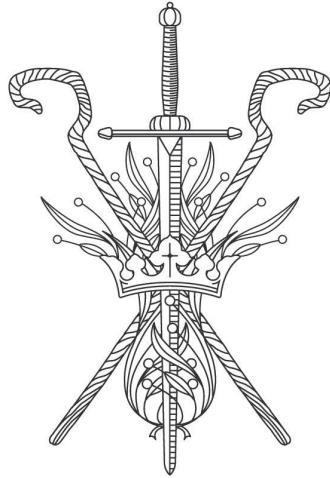
—Austin Rouse  
Pastor of Families and Students  
Southern Heights Baptist Church

*The Law for the Lawless* stands as a vital addition to the reading list of both pastors and church members alike. With an incisive clarity, David Mitzenmacher provides a biblically thorough, theologically consistent, and widely accessible exhortation for the revival of an abiding commitment to the application of God's moral law in every sphere of life. In a world that has lost its moral foundations, this book lays them firmly, and will, no doubt, serve God's people in recovering the architecture of the robustly biblical worldview that our day requires. I look forward to seeing this book added to our churches' resource stall as well as its wide use as a discipling tool among our people.

—Aaron Anderson  
Senior Pastor  
Tropical Farms Baptist Church of Stuart, FL



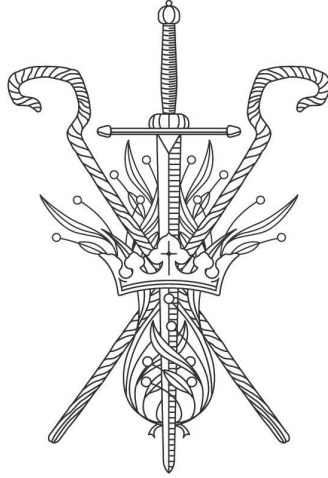
# THE LAW FOR THE LAWLESS





HOW TO RESTORE ORDER IN THE HOME,  
THE CHURCH, AND THE NATION

# THE LAW FOR THE LAWLESS



**DAVID MITZENMACHER**

FOREWORD BY THOMAS K. ASCOL



**FOUNDERS**  
MINISTRIES

***The Law for the Lawless***

*How to Restore Order in the Home, the Church, and the Nation*

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## DEDICATION

*To my wife, Christina: You are an excellent wife,  
more precious than jewels. Many women have done excellently,  
but you surpass them all. You are my faithful helpmeet;  
without your love, support, and encouragement,  
this work would not have been possible.*

*To my children, Stella, Grace, and Zachary:  
Our home overflows with love and laughter because of you.  
May you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
delighting in His law and trusting wholly in His gospel.*

*To Christ be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ideas and arguments in this book were sharpened through conversations with faithful brothers whose counsel I highly esteem. I am particularly grateful to Tom Ascol, Graham Gunden, Justin Harris, and Andrew Walker. Their insights helped refine my thinking at various stages of this project.

Others, no doubt, have also shaped this work in ways I may not even recognize. I am grateful for every word of encouragement, every challenge offered in good faith, and every conversation that helped bring clarity to conviction.

A special acknowledgment is due to Founders Ministries for their support of this project—especially Randy Starkey, who believed in the need for this book before a single word was written.

To the saints of Grace Baptist Church, thank you for your hunger for truth and your love for your pastors. Serving you has strengthened my hand and deepened my joy.



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## FOREWORD

One of the greatest needs of Christians of every persuasion is to recapture a biblical appreciation of God’s law. Because Christians, especially evangelical Christians, want to be known as gospel people, the place of God’s law in the Bible and its role in Christian living are often overlooked. Yet, if Christian history teaches us anything, it is that few subjects compare in importance with understanding both law and gospel. The relationship between the two is the hub from which all other biblical doctrines extend. To be unclear on either law or gospel is to be spiritually paralyzed. To confuse the relationship between the two is to fall into serious, crippling error. The great pastor, theologian and hymn-writer, John Newton, rightly declared:

Clearly to understand the distinction, connection, and harmony between the law and the Gospel, and their mutual subserviency to illustrate and establish each other, is a singular privilege, and a happy means of preserving the soul from being entangled by errors on the right hand or the left.<sup>1</sup>

This is why I am grateful that David Mitzenmacher has written this book. By taking up the most neglected function of God’s moral law he not only shows us the wisdom and goodness of God in giving us His law, but also encourages us and instructs us how to use the law lawfully. The focus of this book is on what has historically been known in the Reformed tradition as the “second use” of the law. This is the role that God has assigned to it to restrain evil in the world.

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1. “On the Right Use of the Law” in *Works of John Newton*, Vol 1:350 (Banner of Truth)

If this all sounds new or strange to you, take heart. Mitzenmacher skillfully and pastorally lays out the framework for teaching on the second use of the law by first explaining the nature of law, the commonly regarded threefold division of the law (moral, civil, and ceremonial) and then the threefold use of the law (to convict, to restrain, to guide). While each these dimensions of God's law is worthy of study on its own, the "second use" of the moral law is in desperate need of being rediscovered by twenty-first century believers.

Many believe that because the law cannot make anyone right with God we should not preach or teach it. After all, we do not want to be legalists! While that concern has some legitimacy to it, it is incomplete. God never intended His law to save anyone. That was never its purpose. But He does have purposes for it and He has revealed those purposes to us in Scripture.

The second purpose, or "use" is to restrain evil in the world. It cannot remove or overcome evil. But where God's moral law is known, proclaimed, and upheld as right and good it can indeed be an instrument that restrains it. Failure to appreciate this function of the law will demotivate Christians from proclaiming it in the public square. But as the pages of this book demonstrate, where God's law has been made known, open immorality is restrained.

While we are in deep need of bold preaching of God's gospel as the only way for sinners to be reconciled to their Creator, we are equally in need of the uncompromising preaching of God's law to show everyone what God requires of those who bear His image. Where this relationship between law and gospel is appreciated and the responsibility to proclaim both is owned, Christians are poised to make disciples and teach those disciples to obey all that our Lord has commanded (Matthew 28:18-20). The result of preaching both law and gospel, under the blessing of God, is that sinners are convicted (by the law) and converted (by the gospel), evil is restrained (out of fear of the Lawgiver), and believers are enabled (by the gospel) and guided (by the law) in the way of righteous living that pleases God.

With theological precision and pastoral skill, David Mitzenmacher has provided us a wonderful resource to reconsider what God has revealed in His law. With helpful case studies he points the way forward to show how the law can and should be proclaimed to restrain evil in the world.

The God who gave us the gospel also gave us the law and He loves His law as much as He loves His gospel. His people need to see this and order our devotion and affections accordingly. This book will help you do just that. I pray that it will be widely read and imminently helpful to Christ's people and, in turn, to the world in which we live.

Thomas K. Ascol  
Cape Coral, Florida



## INTRODUCTION

On February 23, 2025, thieves broke into St. Andrew’s Church in Lincolnshire, England, and stole a painting depicting the Ten Commandments. Although most media reports focused on the irony of stealing an item that included the words “Thou shalt not steal,” this theft aptly illustrates a broader crisis within many churches today: God’s moral law has effectively been taken from their midst, often without notice or resistance.

The term *moral law* refers to God’s unchanging standards of right and wrong, as summarized in the Ten Commandments. This law was initially given to Adam and continues to be universally relevant—it has been written on every human heart, is discernible through the light of conscience, nature, and reason, and was delivered by God in written form at Mount Sinai.

Just as the Ten Commandments were taken from St. Andrew’s Church in Lincolnshire, it seems in many churches as if someone has walked off with God’s moral law somewhere along the way. It should come as no surprise when this neglect of the law occurs at a liberal church. It is entirely consistent for a church that rejects the inerrancy and authority of Scripture to reject its moral demands. Yet, puzzlingly, God’s law is just as absent in many conservative evangelical churches.

Historically, God’s law has served as the ethical backbone for the church, providing clear standards for right and wrong both within congregations and in society at large. When churches taught God’s law, they were equipped to speak boldly about personal ethics and public

theology with moral clarity and conviction. Yet, over recent decades, an increasing number of churches have grown silent regarding these foundational moral truths. Pulpits once boldly brought God's law to bear on pressing moral issues. But all too often, the modern preacher sees God's law, at best, as a perfunctory prologue that stands between him and his gospel presentation. Many pastors back away from making clear moral statements, often fearing accusations of legalism or judgmentalism. As a result, too many Christians are uncertain how to respond biblically and confidently to the moral dilemmas of personal and public life.

The decline in the use and teaching of God's moral law did not happen suddenly or explicitly. Rather, it has gradually unfolded through subtle shifts in theological focus. Because of a well-intended desire to focus solely on the gospel, many pastors have inadvertently neglected to teach their congregations about God's law.

The quiet disappearance of God's moral law from evangelicalism has left Christians vulnerable to confusion and compromise when faced with real-world challenges. Now, more than ever, there is a need for a renewed understanding of the role and value of the moral law in the Christian life and witness.

### **The Great Omission**

One reason for the absence of teaching and preaching on God's law in modern evangelical churches stems from an unintended consequence of something well-intentioned: the "gospel-centered" movement. This movement arose primarily in response to concerns over pragmatism, legalism, and shallow theology that characterized certain evangelical circles in the late twentieth century. Beginning in the early 2000s, popular leaders such as Tim Keller and D. A. Carson, and influential groups like The Gospel Coalition, aimed to refocus churches on the centrality of the gospel to the Christian life. This movement gained momentum quickly, resonating deeply with believers who longed for a Christianity that avoided the ditches of seeker-sensitive pragmatism and rule-following moralism.

Much of this renewed emphasis on the gospel was beneficial. Christians rediscovered the doctrines of grace, Reformed theology, and biblical ecclesiology alongside Christ-centered preaching, grace-saturated discipleship, and gospel-driven missiology. Congregations grew numerically and spiritually as Christians were captivated by a message prioritizing God's grace over human effort. Books, conferences, blogs, and podcasts emerged seemingly out of the woodwork to support this gospel-centered ethos, substantially reshaping evangelical culture.

As the gospel-centered movement expanded, it rightly pushed back against those who reduced Christianity to either legalism or moralistic therapeutic deism. This corrective action helped churches to emphasize core biblical doctrines such as Christ's atonement, justification, sanctification, and union with Christ.

Yet, as the movement matured and became deeply entrenched in evangelical institutions, it began to overcorrect. The emphasis on grace and the centrality of the gospel unintentionally resulted in little, if any, attention being given to God's moral law, especially regarding its role in instructing Christians with respect to societal responsibilities and public ethics. Without explicitly denying the law's importance, the law's place in preaching, teaching, and discipleship was quietly minimized, displaced by an overly simplistic message of grace divorced from any and all ethical implications. The result of this overcorrection has been an anemic form of Christianity that neglects to herald the whole counsel of God.

Historically, the church has thrived when law and gospel were held in proper relationship, each given its rightful place in theology, preaching, and discipleship. The law convicts sinners of their need for grace, restrains evil in this world, and teaches Christians how to live a life that honors Christ. Meanwhile, the gospel proclaims that those who trust in Christ are fully justified and will surely be sanctified and glorified, not through keeping the law but because of the one whose righteousness under the law is counted to their behalf. Together, law and gospel function harmoniously, with the law revealing man's need for the gospel and the gospel empowering believers to obey and delight in God's law.

When Christians abandon or diminish the role of God’s moral law, they create a vacuum that secular ideologies and cultural narratives are ready to fill. Without the clear instruction of the law, Christians become susceptible to confusion, compromise, and even capitulation to the spirit of the age. The consequence is a weakened church—unable to confidently speak truth, articulate moral boundaries, or provide prophetic witness to a world in desperate need of biblical clarity.

Recovering a proper view of the law is, therefore, imperative not only for the individual believer but also for the church’s collective moral witness and influence in society. All Christians are obligated to make the will of Christ supreme in society, and rediscovering the use of God’s moral law provides believers with the confidence and clarity necessary to engage faithfully in moral apologetics and public theology, all rooted firmly in the transformative power of the gospel.

### **The Law of God in the Negative World**

Aaron Renn is a cultural commentator who formulated a framework known as *The Three Worlds of Evangelicalism*, which describes three distinct eras of Christianity’s relationship with Western culture. One of the most significant contributions that Renn’s framework has made is to help explain how, up until relatively recently, the majority of people and institutions in the United States viewed Christianity positively and actively subscribed to Christian values, even if they did so for cultural and not religious reasons.<sup>1</sup> But in recent years, we have entered into what Renn calls *the negative world*, where Christian morals have been rejected by almost all of the powerful institutions in our society as repugnant, backwards, and even dangerous.<sup>2</sup>

Up until the very recent advent of the negative world, the morality of the Ten Commandments was largely just assumed in our society, even by non-Christians. And so, even when churches neglected to teach

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1. Aaron M. Renn, *Life in the Negative World: Confronting Challenges in an Anti-Christian Culture* (Zondervan, 2024), 112.

2. Renn, 6.

on God's moral law, the negative societal consequences were somewhat mitigated. Society itself, influenced heavily by Christian morality, provided an external moral framework cohering (albeit imperfectly) with God's law that helped guide individual and collective behavior, effectively compensating for the church's theological omissions.

However, as society entered into the negative world—where Christian morality is no longer assumed but is now expressly repudiated—the absence of robust moral instruction from the church has become deeply problematic. Christians are ill-equipped to engage effectively with mounting ethical controversies, and the church has lost the potency of its public moral witness.

This deficiency became painfully evident in evangelical responses to the major cultural issues of the last decade. When Christians looked to their churches for guidance on questions like gender identity, many pastors were hesitant or unclear about how to articulate a biblical stance, exposing a lack of preparedness and theological grounding. Similarly, during the cultural upheaval surrounding social justice wars and racial tensions, evangelicals often struggled to provide clear moral leadership rooted in biblical principles and instead appropriated frameworks, tools, and theories that are in direct conflict with God's Word.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps most starkly, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the full extent of this problem. Many evangelical churches allowed themselves to be steered by outside voices rather than following robust and well-informed convictions about the church's responsibility and the limits of government authority. The pandemic not only highlighted existing theological gaps but also underscored the urgency of rediscovering and reaffirming the critical role of God's moral law in the lives of Christians, the church, and society at large.

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3. It can be argued that it was the unbiblical frameworks, tools, and theories that appropriated evangelicalism, and not vice versa.

## Moving Forward by Looking Back

In times of theological confusion and cultural uncertainty, it can be helpful to look to the past for clarity and direction. We must not be so arrogant as to assume that faithful Christians of ages past have nothing to teach us. The saints who came before us stand ready to offer rich resources to help us better understand the role of God's law in private and public life.

During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther and John Calvin both wrote extensively about God's law and its relationship to the gospel. Both Luther and Calvin proposed three functions of the moral law: the law reveals our need for Christ, restrains evil in a society consisting of believers and unbelievers alike, and teaches Christians what God's will is for our lives.

While all three uses of the moral law are vitally important, I believe that it is the law's function of restraining evil that most desperately needs to be recovered by modern Christians. I will define and explain this use of the law in depth in later chapters, but for now, this simple definition will do: the civil use of the moral law is to restrain evil in society, preventing even those opposed to God from acting on every sinful desire they have.

The civil function of the law deserves our renewed attention today. Historically, the civil use of the moral law has enabled Christians to engage faithfully and confidently with the culture around them, affirming justice and righteousness in civic life while simultaneously witnessing to the truth of the gospel.

The neglect of the civil use of the moral law has contributed significantly to evangelicalism's current confusion in responding to ethical challenges. While it is true that every person's greatest need is the gospel of Jesus Christ, Christians are also called to love even their unbelieving neighbors by praying, advocating, and working for the flourishing of good and the restraint of evil, as defined by God's moral law.

## How This Book is Structured

This book is divided into three parts, each building toward a central aim: to recover and reapply the civil use of God’s moral law for the good of our homes, churches, and society. While the structure is sequential, not every reader will approach the material from the same starting point. Some will be encountering these concepts for the first time. Others may already be well-versed in the categories of Reformed theology and moral law. What follows is a roadmap to help both kinds of readers engage profitably.

Part 1 lays the biblical and theological foundation. It offers a concise primer on the nature of God’s moral law, the doctrines of total depravity and common grace, and the historic Reformed distinction between the law’s three uses—with special attention to the civil or political use. These chapters are designed to introduce the essential categories for understanding how the moral law functions among both the regenerate and unregenerate.

Part 2 bridges that foundation to real-world moral structure. It walks through the second table of the Ten Commandments (commandments 5–10), showing how each commandment promotes neighbor-love and restrains societal evil. These chapters are not yet application in the narrow sense; they form a moral architecture, showing how God’s law addresses the public square as a matter of both common grace and moral clarity. They prepare the reader to understand why these laws are good not only for believers but for everyone.

Part 3 is the heart of the book—and the longest section by far. More than half the words in this volume are found here, because this is where doctrine becomes direction. These chapters move into practical application, showing how the civil use of the law operates within the spheres of the home, the church, and society. The focus is not merely on what the law says, but how Christians can faithfully participate in its restraining and preserving function today. This section aims to equip readers for clear thinking and courageous action in the face of growing cultural disorder.

If you are already familiar with the tripartite division of the law, the threefold use of the law, or the Reformed tradition's view of the law and the gospel, you may wish to skim or even skip the first two sections and proceed directly to part 3. But if these ideas are new—or if you want a refreshed theological foundation before turning to application—parts 1 and 2 are designed to bring you up to speed.

The goal of this work is not to produce a detached doctrinal manual or a nostalgic defense of moral conservatism. It is to provide Christians with the tools to think biblically about law, morality, and culture—and to act with wisdom and resolve in their own spheres of influence out of love for God and their neighbors.

With that, we turn to the foundations—what the moral law is and why it matters.

## PART 1

# A PRIMER ON THE CIVIL USE OF THE MORAL LAW

*This book contends that the civil use of God's law—the restraint of evil in society—is an essential and neglected category in modern Christian thought. In contrast to the dominant individualism and pietism of contemporary evangelicalism, Scripture teaches that God restrains evil not only through regeneration but also through the enduring authority of His law applied in the common sphere. This first section lays the doctrinal foundation for that claim.*

*Here we will define what the moral law is, distinguish its three uses, and demonstrate the universality of its authority through both natural revelation and divine command. We will also consider how God governs society through the common grace of civil institutions and how even fallen man remains accountable to the moral standards written on his heart and clarified in Scripture. In short, this section aims to recover a biblical theology of law that makes sense of moral order in a world still under the sovereign hand of God.*