



"To obey God is perfect liberty."
—Seneca

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A Nation of Laws?

A primary concept that separates the United States of America from other nations, particularly those governed by strong men or oligarchies, is the principle of the primacy of law. No person's whims or cadre's machinations are to hold any weight in "the land of the free" unless and until they are duly processed through checks and balances into enacted law. We tout our country as "a nation of laws," in which no individual, not even the Chief Executive, stands above the law. The rights, privileges, and obligations enshrined in our founding documents are to apply equally to all citizens, and the subsequent statutes built upon that foundation are to follow this code of equality before the law also.

America has taken this obsession with law to extremes. Any law passed in Congress seems to run to hundreds or thousands of pages of picayune regulations to cover any and every situation. Added to this are various amendments and supplementary statutes, appropriations, and other rigmarole of lawmaking. Every activity must be covered by laws and regulations, so our law libraries run to thousands of volumes, which no one can possibly comprehend fully. There are so many laws in so many jurisdictions that any person at any time could be considered in violation of one or more of them.

Our near-worship of law has produced a huge number of lawyers - the U.S. has the highest number of lawyers per capita of any country in [the world](#) - and with that has come a powerful lobby that wields sometimes overwhelming influence in Washington and the state capitals. We even make law central in our entertainment; we seem to be fascinated by crime, forensic, and courtroom dramas, all of which revolve around the laws - used and abused - which govern our lives. And when elections roll around every two years or so, everything else takes a backseat to debates about who our lawmakers should be.

Yet, does it not seem ironic - understanding what we do about Americans' soft spot for law - that so many of them are quite willing to break the law when it comes to the question of illegal immigrants? Should a company fudge some numbers on their reporting to the government - prosecute them to the fullest extent of the law! Should a person drive drunk and get in an accident - take away his keys, seize his vehicle, throw him in the slammer, and let him rot! Should a politician take money under the table - smear him, fine him, imprison him, and run him out of town on a rail! However, should the government try to deport an *illegal* immigrant - somebody's housekeeper, gardener, or driver - why, that is inhumane!

A young lady recently called a Charlotte talk show, complaining how long and hard it was for an immigrant, legal or illegal, to get into this country through the proper channels. She proceeded to relate her sob-story about conditions in her former country - the lack of jobs, no opportunity, the repression, etc. - and it wound up with her telling the host that her mother just *had* to take matters into her own hands and cross the border illegally. Her justification was that, since the process was so involved and difficult, going around the law made perfect sense, and the American public should just accept it. What she was really saying was, "Would you not have done the same thing?"

The next day, on another show, a wealthy businessman called in to say that the host's views on this topic were all wet. The caller owned a company involved in agriculture, and he admitted that his firm hired illegal aliens routinely. Why? Normal Americans, he declared, would not work in the fields. Why not? The wage is too low. Well, then, why not follow the law by hiring citizens at a wage they will work for? How naïve! If he did that, he

could not compete in the marketplace, and he would go out of business! According to him, the law was impractical, so he took his chances and ignored it. He would support wholeheartedly any amnesty measure that Congress passed.

And let us not forget the bureaucrats. Their line is that 11-12 million illegal immigrants live in this country already (a number that at best can be called a "guesstimate"), and rounding up, processing, and deporting that many people is both physically impossible and prohibitively expensive. Thus, they have ignored the laws already on the books for years, and should Congress pass more immigration laws, they will most likely ignore them too.

What can one conclude except that Americans [love](#) law in principle, but when the law begins to squeeze them and their accustomed lifestyles, why, it becomes perfectly acceptable to ignore, bend, or break the offending law. As [Romans 8:7](#) says about people's attitude toward God's law - and we find that it applies equally well to man's laws - "the carnal mind is enmity against [God](#) ; for it is not subject to the [law of God](#), nor indeed can be." When millions of people display this self-centered attitude toward law, taking matters into their own hands, anarchy is the result (see [Judges 21:25](#)).

True, man's laws are too often poorly written and weakly enforced by those sworn to do so. However, despite America being a free country, this deficiency in the nation's, state's, county's, or city's laws does not give us the right to become scoff-laws. Americans are at heart a rebellious people (see [Ezekiel 2:3-4](#)), having given birth to this republic in civil war and fighting among ourselves at every turn, and the Founders, knowing this, wrote into our basic covenants processes for correcting bad law and bad government. Unfortunately, these measures are rarely used, as either we cannot agree on what should be done or we lack the will to carry them through. So these problems continue, and the country slides further toward chaos.

Nevertheless, we can test ourselves ([II Corinthians 13:5](#)) in regard to law. What is our attitude toward it, especially toward God's law? Is it, "Oh, how I love Your law?" Or is it, "Those laws don't apply to me?" Be honest.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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[The Law's Purpose and Intent](#)

by Martin G. Collins

The effectiveness of a law is found in its purpose and intent rather than the letter. The blind spots to God's Law unfortunately are found in the spiritual application or principle rather than a specific motor behavior. Christ taught that the righteousness of the Pharisees was not enough to fulfill the law's requirements. Love and mercy constitute the essence of the spiritual fulfillment of the Law. God's Holy Spirit enables us to carry out the spiritual intent of the Law. By continually using God's Spirit, we gradually or incrementally take on God's nature in our innermost beings. As we judge other people, we must realize that the things that offend us mirror our own (hidden from us but transparent to others) faults.

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by John O. Reid

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