

The Scout Law in the Light of Scripture: How the Scout Law Subverts the Function God's Law is to Serve

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Pressure on Parents and Children

Parents who have children in grade school know how persistent the pressures are for their children to join the Scouts. If your child's public school teacher isn't handing out information on Scouts, your child will certainly view the appealing Scouting advertisements on television. If the neighbor boy isn't parading down the block dressed in his Scout uniform, the evening paper will carry a picture of the latest advancements in a local troop. When your child tells you, "Everybody's joining," he's almost correct. Few are the parents who do not feel these pressures; however, even fewer are the parents who know from Scripture why they and their children should not become involved in the Scouting movement.

Scouting and Religion

Literature on Scouting states clearly that Scouting and religion are closely connected. "The Boy Scouts of America maintains that no boy can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing his obligation to God. In the first part of the Scout Oath or Promise the boy declares, "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law. The recognition of God as the ruling and leading power in the universe and the grateful acknowledgment of His favors and blessings are necessary to the best type of citizenship and are wholesome precepts in the education of the growing boy."¹

The Scouting movement recognizes the importance of religion in a child's training, but it firmly maintains that it does not enter into the religious training of the child, "Scouting recognizes the essential part that religion must play in character building, but the Boy Scout Movement does not attempt to provide in its own name this religious training for youth. To do so would be highly presumptuous and an intrusion into the field of the church."ⁱⁱ

If this last statement were 100 per cent correct, there would be no reason to withhold our approval of Scouting. If religious training were left to the church alone, we would welcome the chance for our children to benefit from the hobbies, nature hikes, and citizenship studies. Since, however, the Scouting movement has never divorced itself from the religious training of children, Christians who listen to the words of Scripture find Scouting objectionable.

God's Law and the Scout Law

Is it fair to make the statement that Scouting has never divorced itself from the religious training of children? If it can be shown that Scouting teaches a religion of its own, can it also be demonstrated that the Scout religion is not the religion which Scripture presents? To find answers to these questions it becomes necessary to compare the obvious precepts of Scouting with the clear teachings of the Bible.

Where does one begin with such a comparison? It is logical to look to those statements which best summarize the philosophy of Scouting. "Every educational system implies a philosophy; every institution has its own spirit by which it lives and expresses itself. The Spirit of Scouting, its vital principle and its living expression, is the Scout Promise and the Scout Law." How does the Scout Law fare when compared with the two great doctrines of the Bible,

Law and Gospel? This article will restrict itself to a comparison between God's Law and the Scout Law.

God's Law Reveals Sin

God gave His Law to mankind for one primary purpose—to reveal sin. Through the Law God endeavors to show every mortal that he is a sinner, deserves the wrath of God, and is on a collision course with eternal death. “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). Only the man who recognizes his sin can recognize the need of the Savior.

Since God designed that the Law should reveal sin, He deliberately summarized it in 10 short commands beginning with “Thou shalt” or “Thou shalt not.” God did not intend that hearing these commands should be a pleasant experience for our ears or for our hearts. The Ten Commandments stand with their sharp wording to penetrate even the hardest shell of self-righteousness.

Improving God's Law

Lord Baden-Powell, the founder of Scouting, did not approve of the way in which God worded His Law, nor did he agree with the purpose for which God had originally given His Law. This man set out to “improve” on God's Law—a presumptuous undertaking. His action is still defended in Scout literature today. “The Scout Law is based upon the codes of old, but transformed into a positive, living ideal for the modern boy. Most laws start with a ‘Do’ or a ‘Don't.’ with a ‘You must’ or ‘You mustn't’—they either command or prohibit. The Scout Law does neither. It is a simple statement of fact, of what is expected of a Scout.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Subverting God's Law

When we analyze this statement, we find the admission that the Scout Law “is based upon the codes of old.” The implication is that God's Ten Commandments are one of the “codes of old.” However, those Ten Commandments “have been transformed into a positive, living ideal.” This is no improvement; God intended to reveal sin by His Law. That Law has been weakened to a simple statement of fact, of what is expected of a Scout.” The Scout Law, as it is worded and taught, leaves children (and adults) with the impression that a human being has the potential to keep the Scout Law and thus also God's Law. Sin, which God intended to be revealed by His Law, is treated as nonexistent. The Scout Law subverts the function God's Law is to serve.

One of the 12 Scout Laws which conceals sin rather than reveals sin is: “A Scout is Obedient. He obeys his parents, Scoutmaster, patrol leaders, and all other duly constituted authorities.” The Fourth Commandment also speaks of our relationship to constituted authority but begins: “Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother.” The Scout Law gives a person the false security that with genuine effort he can obey all authorities; the Fourth Commandment leaves no one with such an impression.

The last Scout Law is: “A Scout is Reverent. He is reverent towards God.” How can this stand as a “statement of fact” when Scripture speaks of man's complete inability even to know who the true God is, much less to know what that God expects of him? By nature no man has this ability to show reverence to God, for all men are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1).

The Scout Law does subvert the function God's Law is to serve. Sin is not called sin. The sinner is given a false security that he can keep the Law. We dare not entrust our children to an organization offering such credentials!

ⁱ Charter and Bylaws of the Boy Scouts of America, (1966) p. 15.

ⁱⁱ Scouting in the Lutheran Church, p. 10.

ⁱⁱⁱ Scoutmaster's Handbook, (1967) p. 20.