

THE LAW OF GOD and THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

“Do we then make void the Law through Faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the Law.” Romans 3:31

Many people today have the Law and the Gospel backwards. They think that they need to keep the Law in order to become Christians. As a result they are frustrated with failure, shame and guilt. They don't understand why the Gospel does not work in their experience. Their problem is that they are getting the proverbial cart before the horse.

Salvation is by the Grace of God alone, received by Faith alone. We do not keep the Law in order to be saved. We keep the Law because we are saved.

The Law condemns – but the Gospel of Christ saves.

The Law reveals our sin – but the Gospel reveals the Saviour.

The Law makes us guilty – but the Gospel of Christ offers us forgiveness.

The Law demands payment – but the Gospel of Jesus Christ pays our debts to God.

American evangelist D.L. Moody declared: *“The Law is a mirror to show us who we are – but you cannot wash yourself with a mirror.”*

The Law cannot make us righteous. The Law cannot save. The Law cannot sanctify. However, the Law does reveal our sin - but it is only Jesus Christ who can redeem us from our sin.

“...Sin is lawlessness.” 1 John 3:4

“The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” Psalm 19:7

“But he who looks into the perfect Law of liberty and continues in it and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the Word, this one will be blessed in what he does.” James 1:25

The Law of the Lord convicts of sin (Romans 7:7-11).

The Law condemns transgression (Romans 4:15; James 2:10).

The Law restrains evil (1 Timothy 1:8-11; Psalm 119:11).

The Law drives people to Christ (Galatians 3:24; Psalm 19:7).

The Law of God guides our sanctification (Romans 8:4).

The Law of God lies at the very heart of the New Covenant. (***“Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel...I will put My Law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be My people.”*** Jeremiah 31:31-33).

The Ten Commandments reflect the character of God. ***“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.”*** Leviticus 19:2

We human beings were not created autonomous – that is free to be a law unto ourselves, but theonomous – subject to the Law of God. This is not a hardship because God has created us in such a way that grateful obedience will bring us the greatest joy. Duty and delight coincide.

King David wrote in the Psalms: ***“Let me walk in the paths of Your commandments, for I delight in it.”*** Psalm 119:35; ***“O, how I love Your Law! It is my meditation all the day.”*** Psalm 119:97; ***“I love Your Law.”*** Psalm 119:113; ***“I love Your Commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold!”*** Psalm 119:1-7.

The Apostle Paul taught: ***“Therefore the Law is holy, and the Commandment holy and just and good.”*** Romans 7:12; ***“For I delight in the Law of God according to the inward man.”*** Romans 7:22.

The Apostle John wrote: ***“By this we know we are the children of God, when we love God and keep His Commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His Commandments. And His Commandments are not burdensome. And whoever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world – our Faith.”*** 1 John 5:2-4

The fallen human heart hates God’s Law – both because it is Law, and because it comes from God. However, those who know and love Christ, love His Law and want to keep it, both out of gratitude for God’s grace and mercy, and to please God. God’s children also find that the Holy Spirit leads them into degrees of obedience to God’s Law that they had never been able to attain before.

John Bunyan, in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, offers us a literary vision of the relationship between Law and Grace. In this Spiritual masterpiece, the main character, Christian, is brought to a large, beautiful parlour by Interpreter. The room has not been dusted, or swept, in many years. It is thick with dust and cobwebs. Interpreter calls in a man with a broom and asks him to sweep the room. As the man sweeps, the room is filled with dust causing Christian to choke, cough and gasp for breath.

Then, Interpreter calls in a lady and bids her sprinkle the room with water. After this the dust settles and the room is easily cleaned.

“What means this?” Christian asked Interpreter. He replied that the room ***“is the heart of a man that was never sanctified by the sweet grace of the Gospel. The dust is his original sin and inward corruptions that have defiled the whole man. He that began to sweep at first is the Law; but she that brought water and did sprinkle it is the Gospel.”***

What John Bunyan here explains to us is it is the Law that stirs up sin until our spirits can hardly breathe. We choke with the sin that is swept up into our faces by the Law, until we are convicted and realise the utter depravity of our situation.

Those who are outside of Christ don’t want to hear the Law of God, because they know they are guilty. Those who are in Christ often don’t want to hear the Law of God either, because it makes them fearful when they forget the grace of God.

In *Pilgrim’s Progress* we read that after Christian had struggled for a long time with the great, exhausting burden of guilt and sin strapped to his back, he made his way up the hill of Calvary. As he climbed to the top of that hill, he saw there a cross and upon that cross, One hanging who is the Son of God. As Pilgrim lifted his eyes to look at the Cross, suddenly the burden of his guilt broke

loose and this great weight on his back rolled down the hill and disappeared into a dark sepulchre, never to be seen again.

Then three shining angels appeared to him, greeting him: *“Peace be to thee!”*

The first one declared to him: *“Thy sins be forgiven thee.”*

The second angel removed from him the filthy, foul rags of his unrighteousness and clothed him with the white robe of Christ’s perfect obedience that he might stand faultless before our Holy God.

The third angel gave him a sealed scroll, with the guarantee of eternal Salvation in the Paradise of God.

In his sermon on Galatians 3:24-25, entitled *The Stern Pedagogue (The Strict Teacher)*, Charles Haddon Spurgeon declared: *“The Law which is so sharp and terrible to men when it only deals with them for their good, will if you and I die without being brought to Christ, be much more terrible to us in Eternity, when it deals with us in justice for our punishment... You that have despised Him as the Saviour, will have to appear before Him as your Judge... Oil is soft, but set it on fire, and see how it burns! Love is sweet, but curdle it to jealousy, and see how sour it is! If you turn the Lamb of Zion into the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Beware! For He will tear you in pieces, and there shall be none to deliver... The pierced hand was outstretched with invitations of mercy, but if these are rejected, O, sirs, I am telling you solemn truth, and hear it, I pray you, ere I send you away – if, from that hand that was pierced you will not take the perfect salvation which He is prepared to give to all who confess their guilt, you will have to receive from that selfsame hand the blows of the iron rod which will break you in pieces as a potters vessel.”*

We must be absolutely sure of this. No one will get to Heaven by keeping the Commandments. You are a guilty lawbreaker and need God’s forgiveness, pardon and mercy. Any serious examination of the Ten Commandments will convince every honest person to cry out to God for mercy and forgiveness. *“Lord, have mercy on me – a sinner!”*

There can be no grace where there is no guilt. There can be no mercy where there is no sin. If you are not a sinner, God cannot have mercy on you. Where misery is not felt, mercy will not be appreciated. No one will seek mercy until he first pleads his guilt.

The Commandments do not make us clean; they show us that we need cleansing and prompt us to seek our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ alone for Redemption.

As we consider the Duties Required by the Ten Commandments we recognise that we have not performed these duties. When we consider the Sins Forbidden in the Ten Commandments we must admit that we are guilty. We are guilty lawbreakers and have no hope of being saved by perfectly obeying God’s Ten Commandments.

To those that recognise their desperate plight, the Word of God comes: ***“Ho! Everyone who thirsts come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you...”*** Isaiah 55:1-3

On the first Christmas evening angels from Heaven declared to the shepherds outside Bethlehem: ***“I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people!”*** Luke 2:10

The Gospel is Good News to those who recognise that they have broken the Laws of the living God. God sheds His grace upon those who acknowledge that they are lawbreakers and criminals who stand guilty before the throne of our Holy God. God welcomes us, who once hated and rebelled against Him, forgives all our sins, and adopts us into His family as sons and daughters. And then He commissions us as His servants and soldiers to serve His Kingdom in the fight of Faith. If we will but bow before Him and confess our crimes of rebellion then His gift of Eternal Life is ours.

No good works of man have ever been enough to cover the wickedness and rebellion of depraved man. Only the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ has been enough to pay for our atonement. It is absolutely imperative that we get the order of things right. It is after we have trusted in Christ alone for our salvation that we are redeemed and adopted into the family of God. It is then, and only then, that we are able to obey the Commandments, not in order to be saved, but because we are saved.

In other religions, good works are done *in order to*. Man endeavours to reach up to and find God. However only in Christianity are good works a *therefore*. Religion is us reaching up to God. Christianity is God reaching down to us, in and through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Before the First Commandment was given in Exodus 20, God declared: ***“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me...”*** Exodus 20:2-3

Salvation precedes adherence to the Law. It is only once we have experienced God’s gracious Redemption that we are able in any meaningful way, to obey His Commandments. Once we have yielded and surrendered our lives wholeheartedly to Christ, experiencing His cleansing and transforming power then we are able to see the Law of God search our hearts, inspire our souls, direct our strength and rule our minds on the Highway of Sanctification. With the Holy Spirit within us, and guiding us, God’s moral Law becomes our standard, guide and protection. As we seek to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength trusting in His power alone, we find the truth of what Jesus taught: ***“If you love Me, keep My Commandments.”*** John 14:15

“Love so amazing, so Divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

In the ten short precepts of the Ten Commandments, we find all moral virtues, the full compass of our accountability to our Creator, and responsibility towards our neighbour. The essence of all God’s just decrees and statutes are distilled and summarised in the Ten Commandments. God requires the total obedience of each person to all the implications of His Law. The Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 99) teaches: *“The Law binds the whole man...unto obedience forever”*; *“It is spiritual, and so reaches the understanding, will, affections and all other powers of the soul as well as the words, works and gestures.”* *“...Where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; and where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded.”*

Studying the Ten Commandments, it is also necessary for us to consider the issue of legalism. Legalism is a distortion of obedience that twists motives and purpose, seeing good deeds as a way to earn God’s favour. Legalism can produce arrogant and contemptuous adherents concealing self-seeking and pride and squeezing out all humility, kindness and compassion.

The legalists amongst the Pharisees thought that, because they were descendants of Abraham, they were guaranteed approval by God. They formalized daily observance of the Law, down to the minutest details. Yet they avoided the heart of the Law. Jesus condemned the hypocrisy of the Pharisees whose outward show hid inner corruption. They were a brood of vipers, whitewashed tombs full of dead man's bones. The Pharisees, whom Jesus condemned, presented themselves as faithful keepers of the Law of Moses. Yet, in emphasising minor details they neglected what mattered most. Their elaborate and misguided interpretations of the Law denied it's true spirit and nature. They substituted human tradition for God's authoritative Law, binding consciences where God had left them free. They were hypocritical, condemning others and acting for human approval. (Matthew 23:23-24; Matthew 15:3-9; 23:16-24; Mark 2:16; 3:6; 7:1-8; Luke 20:45-47; Matthew 6:1-8; 23:2-7). Legalism attempts to place man's traditions on the same level as God's Law.

The Judaizers, who Paul opposed, were legalists who taught that one could only be saved through keeping the Law. They taught Christian believers that they must first become Jews before they could become Christians. Circumcision was essential to Salvation. The Judaizers denied the sufficiency of Christ, requiring adherence to the Jewish ceremonial law, rituals and calendar as requirements for Salvation. The Apostle Paul wrote against the heresies of the Judaizers in Galatians and Colossians, warning that their legalism corrupted the way of Salvation, bringing unbearable burdens upon God's people.

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught: ***“Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”***

Matthew 11:28-30

*“He gives more grace when the burdens grow greater
He sends more strength when the labours increase
To added afflictions He adds His mercy
To multiply trials His multiplied peace.*

*“When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed before the day is half done
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources
Our Father's full giving has only begun.*

*“His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He gives and gives and gives again.”*

John Newton, the one-time slave trader turned pastor and author of the famous Hymn *Amazing Grace* wrote: *“I'm not what I might be, I'm not what I ought to be, I'm not what I wish to be, I'm not what I hope to be; but I thank God I'm not what I once was, and I can say with the great Apostle, ‘by the grace of God I am what I am.’”*

*“O, to grace how great a debtor
Daily I am constrained to be!
And let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,*

*Prone to leave the God I love;
Take my heart, O, take and seal it,
Seal it from Thy courts above!”*

“Grace...turns counters into gold, pebbles into pearls, sickness into health, weakness into strength and wants into abundance.” Thomas Brooks

The Law says ‘do’; the Gospel says **Done!**
The Law says ‘go’; the Gospel says **Come!**

“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.” Isaiah 1:18

“I have loved you with an everlasting love.” Jeremiah 31:3

Nothing shall be able separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:39).

“Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect?” Romans 8:33

You have heard the Law of God. You have heard the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Have you confessed your sins and repented of your rebellion against Almighty God? Repent and be converted.

“Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will freely pardon.” Isaiah 55:6-7

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