

The Big Picture of Salvation

Scripture: Galatians 3:15–18

Code: 48-15

Let's go back to the third chapter of Galatians this morning. You may feel a little bit like you are in a seminary class. When we go through the Word of God we have to take what comes, and some of it is a little more intellectually challenging, at least on the surface, than other parts of it. As you heard in the little video, children learn by stories, and so do we as adults, as a matter of fact. But there are times, particularly in the epistles of Paul, where his presentations of logical truth are powerful and rather complex; and this is one of those.

We have been working our way through Galatians, having a great time. We've arrived down at chapter 3, verse 14. But as we start into verse 15, this is one of the challenging portions of this book, and it's going to demand your attention. If you're wandering around in and out you might find it difficult to reconnect. So just some encouraging word that I think at the end the benefit will become clear to you in your own understanding as we work our way through what Paul says. But let me give you a little bit of background.

The Christian gospel is that everybody sins. Everybody breaks God's law, every human being who's ever lived, except the person of Christ; and therefore, we're all under divine judgment, we're all cursed by God, we're all on our way to eternal hell. God, however, is not only a judge, He is also gracious, and He is willing to forgive and eager to forgive. And so we are told that we can escape the consequences of our sin by putting our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, who took our place on the cross and bore the punishment that we should have received. That's the Christian gospel, that those who believe in Christ have their sins covered, because Christ paid in full the penalty for their sins to the extent that the justice of God was satisfied or propitiated.

And the reason there was a Reformation 500 years ago, 500 years ago next month – Luther penned his 95 Theses on the door of the church of Wittenberg. The reason there was a Reformation from Catholicism 500 years ago was because the Catholic Church had been teaching that salvation was a combination of faith and works, faith and works. And the Reformers understood the Bible to say, "The just shall live by faith alone." It is of faith, it is by grace, and not according to works. And that was the reason there was a Protestant Reformation. And "Protestant" is just a form of the word "protest," and the protest was against an aberrant doctrine of salvation, which brought faith and works together, and therefore canceled out the true gospel of faith alone.

So Paul is facing an attack on this already. This is the earliest of his letters. So not very long into the apostolic ministry, he had gone to a region called Galatia over in the Mediterranean area, and he had preached in many cities, and churches had been founded in the churches of this region called Galatia. It was Gentile/Pagan world, part of the Roman Empire.

Where Paul went, he preached the gospel, and there were some Jews who were saved. But they were predominantly churches made up of Gentiles who had no connection to the law of Moses at all. They weren't raised in it, they didn't know about it. All they had heard was the gospel of Jesus Christ;

and they were saved, and churches were founded.

It wasn't long after this had happened that some Jews from Jerusalem came into Galatia. They were actually dogging the steps of the apostle Paul. They wanted to correct the teaching that Paul was giving, and their correction was to say that, "No, salvation is not by faith alone, salvation is by faith; plus you must adhere to the laws and rules of Moses, and that includes physical circumcision, and other ceremonies and rites and rituals and distinctives." They were asking believers to admit that they were not genuinely converted, that they hadn't really been regenerated. They hadn't really been saved; they hadn't really been transformed; they weren't really headed to heaven. They hadn't really received the Holy Spirit, and they wouldn't until they began to obey the Mosaic structure.

Paul is deeply disturbed by this. These people were called Judaizers because they were Jews trying to Judaize Gentiles. Paul was extremely concerned about this, and so he writes this epistle to clarify the fact that salvation is by faith alone, faith alone and not by works. Salvation by faith alone produces works, but works are not a component in the means of salvation. They are not a cause of salvation, they're an effect of salvation. So he writes Galatians to establish the gospel of grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and faith alone.

Now in order to do that, he has to establish his apostolic authority, because there's no New Testament. So they have to believe, they have to believe the right people, because the New Testament isn't yet written down in completion. So they have to trust Paul as a true apostle of Jesus Christ. They have to trust him as the messenger of God. So he spends the first two chapters defining and defending his apostleship, so that they will know they need to listen to him, because he is the one sent by the Lord Jesus Christ, sent by God, the author of salvation.

Then after doing that in chapters 3 and 4, he begins to lay out his argument for salvation by faith alone, and he starts in the opening five verses by reminding them of their own experience. "You already received salvation," he said. "You already were transformed. You already saw the miracle of regeneration take place in the people around you and in your own life. You already have received and experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. How can you possibly believe that you're not yet saved when you've experienced all of this? Why would you believe the Judaizers who are telling you that your salvation is not legitimate, it's not real if you don't adhere to the strict laws of the Mosaic economy? Why would you believe that when you've already experienced the full blessing of salvation and the power of the Holy Spirit? "It's foolish for you to deny your own experience."

Now the second argument starts in verse 6 where we've began reading, and he says salvation is by faith alone now, and it always has been. And so he goes all the way back to Abraham to use Abraham as the example, and he says in verse 6, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." That's Genesis 15:6.

Way back in the early chapters of Genesis, God says, "Because this man Abraham believed Me, it was accounted to him as righteousness." That is to say, when a person believes, God credits righteousness to them. You can't earn it; God gives it as a gift of grace to one who believes in Him. So with Abraham, salvation was by faith. He was justified by faith.

Furthermore, he wasn't justified by keeping the law, because as it says over in verse 17, the law came 430 years after Abraham; 430 years after Abraham the law came. So Abraham could never

have had as a component of his justification his salvation as being right with God – any adherence to the law, the law of Moses, circumcision, Sabbath, observances. And they're talking primarily about external elements, the ceremonial aspects of the law rather than the moral part of it. It couldn't possibly be true of Abraham or anybody in Abraham's time, or anybody from before Abraham, through Abraham, all the way to Moses, because there was no law.

Jew or Gentile, going all the way back to Abraham, are saved by faith alone; and that is made effective, because the Lord Jesus Christ takes on the curse for all believers all the way back to Abraham and all the way forward to the last believer before the new heavens and the new earth. His death covers all the sins of all the believers through all of redemptive history all of time.

Now the Jews are going to make an argument, and Paul knows that argument, and this is what you have to understand to get the passage; and once you get this, you'll know where we're going. Paul anticipates the argument he's going to hear. He does this a lot; you see it all through the book of Romans, as you do here. He knows that Jews who are demanding adherence to circumcision and the ceremonial law of Moses. He knows what their thinking is going to be, and he knows what they're going to say, and here it is.

They're going to say this: God granted to Moses – I take it back. God granted to Abraham – forget Moses for a moment. God granted to Abraham and all the people up to Moses pure salvation by faith alone, because there was no law. So, initially, the plan of salvation was by faith alone, because God had not given the law yet. They would say then, when God gave the law, the way of salvation changed.

Now the Jews would admit that what God said to Abraham in Genesis 12 when He first gave Abraham his promise and covenant, was just a promise: "I will. I will. I will. I will. I'll bless you. I'll bless the nations through you." All blessing; and He reiterated it again and again, both to Abraham and to his descendants. So they understand that God promised Abraham in that covenant.

So we say the Abrahamic covenant is a covenant of promise. It's a covenant of promise. There are no conditions really in that original covenant, "I will. I will. I will. I will." It is a unilateral covenant. And even when God ratifies the covenant with Abraham, He puts Abraham to sleep, because it's not a mutual covenant; He puts him to sleep, and before he goes to sleep, He has him cut up a bunch of animals, lay them on the ground, and God, as a cloud of darkness, passes through the animals. That's how you cut a covenant. When you made a covenant, you killed animals, split the pieces, went through sealing in blood your commitment.

But it wasn't a covenant between God and Abraham; He put Abraham to sleep. It was a covenant unilaterally with God Himself: "I will bless you, and through you and through your seed the Messiah, I will bless the world." That's a covenant of promise.

So they're going to say, however, when the law came the plan changed, and now the law of God is the new way of salvation. It doesn't eliminate faith, it doesn't deny faith; it says that it's faith plus obedience to the law of Moses. It is a necessary condition along with faith.

And by the way, these Jewish teachers, false teachers, were professing to believe in Christ, and to believe in Him as their Messiah. But they were saying, "Yes, the way has changed since Moses. God

changed the plan.” They likely said that the law was annulled and the law was – rather that faith was annulled by the law, and faith was supplanted by the law, so that now the new way is faith and obedience, faith and works, faith and keeping the law. And they would ask the question, “Well then, why did God give the law if that’s not true?”

And we know that’s the question; look at verse 19. Paul postulates that as the question: “Why the Law then? What’s the point? If Abraham already believed and it was counted to him for righteousness, and other people before the law believed and it was counted to them for righteousness, what’s the point of the Law, unless the Law is a new component in God’s requirement for salvation?”

Paul’s answer to that is the rest of chapter 3. And, relax, we’re not going to work our way through this. It is complicated; it is incredibly rich. I’m going to try to do something that I hope will help you. I’m trying to give you a big picture this morning, okay; and then in weeks to come, we’ll dive down deep. But for now, I just want to give you the big picture, okay.

Let’s start with this. We do know that salvation was by faith in the day of Abraham, but we also know that it was by faith beyond Abraham. Go down to verse 11 of chapter 3. “No one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, ‘The righteous man shall live by faith.’” That is taken out of the prophet Habakkuk, who lived hundreds of years after the law. So here we are with Habakkuk after the law, Habakkuk chapter 2, verse 4: “The just shall live by faith. The righteous shall live by faith.”

So before Moses and after Moses, the righteous live by faith. Moses and the law, Moses – we speak of Moses connected to the law, because he was the one to whom God gave the law. The law has not changed anything, not changed anything. Still the prophets are saying, “The just shall live by faith.”

God gave the law, and God gave the law – listen, God was not a reluctant lawgiver. When God gave the law He put on some kind of display. He put on some kind of display. It involved majesty. It involved things like thunder, lightening, earthquakes, trumpet blasts, darkness, whirlwind, blazing flames upon Mount Sinai. This was a mega demonstration of the seriousness of God regarding the law. And he told the people, “Don’t come near. If you touch the mountain you’ll die.”

And God put the law in place for the subsequent 1,500 years, until Christ. Why? Why? If salvation by faith was already in place, why did God bring the law? He answers pretty clear. Look at verse 19: “It was added because of transgressions.” Go down to verse 23: “We were kept in custody under the law.” Verse 24: “The Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.” There we learn the purpose of the law.

The purpose of the law is added because of transgressions. Its purpose was to reveal clearly sin, clearly sin. And not only to reveal sin, but to reveal guilt. And then to drive people to God in repentance to cry out in faith for that justifying grace. The law was given to make the sinner know how sinful he was.

Now we’re talking about the moral part of the law. The ceremonial part was given to separate Israel from the nations around them. They had dietary laws, they had cooking laws, they had clothing laws, they had Sabbath laws; they had all kinds of prescriptions laid out in the Old Testament to isolate them from the nations around them, because there was such a treat. Paganism was around them.

There were a tiny little island in a sea of boiling paganism. God wanted to preserve them and protect them, so that they could be a witness to Him, the one true God, in the midst of the polytheistic nations, and so He insulated them by giving them laws that made it very difficult for them to interact with other people. That was a protection, those sort of external, physical laws.

And I don't know if you have ever thought about this; but the Sabbath was never given to the whole world, never. The Sabbath law was never given to the whole world. God made a Sabbath law only with Israel. He said, "I'm the God of Israel, and I declare that Israel is to keep My Sabbath." He didn't even give the Abrahamic covenant to the whole world, He gave it to Abraham and his descendants. And He narrowed those descendants down through the patriarchs, didn't He? He didn't give the Scripture to the world, He gave it to Israel. So God had a witness nation in the midst of the world of paganism, and He insulated them by certain sort of external rules and rituals that they had to adhere to. And He also had them focus on all kinds of restrictions on the Sabbath so they would keep their focus on Him, and worship Him.

Now Abraham received the promise, but the promise lacked clarity on one thing. The promise lacked clarity on sin. It just lacked some clarity on sin. In fact, in the Abrahamic promise it doesn't say anything about sin, except that anybody who curses Israel will be cursed. So there wasn't a real definition of sin, which may be, when you're asking this question, the answer to why you have in the Old Testament so many sinful people who are God's people, or why you have polygamy, or why you have other kind of immoral behaviors.

But, remember, during that pre-Mosaic time, there was not that clear definition of sin. But down in verse 19 we read that the law then is added 430 years after Abraham, so that transgressions might be crystal clear. And, secondly, in the midst of our knowledge of sin and awareness of guilt, the law points us to Christ. How does it do that? The whole sacrificial system in the law points us to a final sacrifice, to a final atonement in the Lamb of God. So the covenant of Abraham is fundamental. The law comes in 430 years later.

Now I want to give you three things to think about with regard to the law. Number one: In the past, the law was addition, the law was addition. In no sense did the Mosaic law set aside the covenant with Abraham.

Look down at verse 15. Paul says even if you're making a man's covenant, "I speak in terms of human relations: even if you only make a man's covenant, when it's been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it." You make a covenant with somebody, that covenant stands; you don't alter it.

And then he says in verse 16, applying that principle, "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed." And he doesn't say, "to seeds," as to referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your see," that is, Christ. What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise." The Mosaic covenant does not nullify the Abrahamic covenant.

So the Abrahamic covenant, a covenant of promise, salvation by faith, is not nullified by the law; the law is simply an addition. And what is it added to do? It is added to clearly expose our sin and our guilt, and drive us to the Redeemer.

Did the Jews have a sense they needed a Redeemer? Do you understand that they were slaughtering lambs by the millions, and goats constantly through their history from Moses on, because God said, "Somebody must die, and I will accept a substitute temporarily," all pointing toward Christ? So what the Old Testament ceremonial law did was isolate Israel; the Old Testament sacrificial law pointed them to a Redeemer; and the Old Testament moral law established the nature of God, which was unchanging.

So the covenant of Abraham is fundamental, the law doesn't change that. For 500 years from Abraham to Moses, not much information or revelation about repentance. But when the law comes in, now repentance is added with power and force. You might say for 2,000 years God had established faith leading up to Messiah; 1,500 of those years He established repentance.

The addition was necessary. It was necessary with all of its somberness, all of its seriousness, not because the Abrahamic covenant was replaced, but because the Abrahamic covenant lacked a sufficient emphasis on sin in definitive terms. What came in the Mosaic law morally was plenty of evidence that man had no ability to redeem himself, because he just constantly broke the law of God, and he constantly offered sacrifice, after sacrifice, after sacrifice, which just showed not only the recognition of sin, but the recognition for the need for the death of a substitute.

So we say then that the Mosaic law, the Mosaic covenant; Abraham, a covenant of promise; Moses, a covenant of works. But that covenant is addition, not replacement. All those religions of the world that put works into salvation fail to understand that. The Abrahamic covenant of promise, salvation by faith alone, has not been replaced. God revealed the law to Moses, a vast complex of external religious rules, as well as ethical, moral rules and laws and commandments. Yet you could sum them all up in the moral sense with two statements: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and your neighbor as yourself." And since no one could do that, the whole world is found guilty. And that was the purpose of the law.

Abraham received a covenant of promise, Moses a covenant of law. The first was positive, the second was negative. The first promised blessing; the second, cursing. Back to verse 13 again: "Cursed." Why? Back to verse 10: "Cursed is everyone who doesn't abide by all things written in the book of the law." Abraham brings promise and blessing; Moses brings duty, commandments, and cursing. And that is what defines the truth that all sinners need to understand, that we, having violated the law of God, the moral law of God, are all cursed, all headed for judgment, all guilty. But God is a God of grace who holds out a promise of forgiveness and eternal life to those who believe in Him by faith alone. And by that faith in Him and in Christ, He imputes His righteousness to us, and covers our sin, because Christ has paid the penalty in His death on the cross.

The covenant with Abraham promised life. The covenant with Abraham promised life. Paul talks about the fact that we live by faith, down in verse 11. The covenant with Moses promised – what? – death. "The soul that sins, it shall die." "The wages of sin is death." That's why Paul in 2 Corinthians 3 says that the covenant of Moses kills. It is a ministry of death.

The Mosaic covenant reaches its apex at the cross in the death of Christ, who died under the curse of the Mosaic law. The Abrahamic covenant reaches its apex at the resurrection, when the risen Christ provides life to His people by faith. Powerful, sweeping truth regarding the role of these

covenants.

“By faith,” – Hebrews 11:17 says – “by faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your descendants shall be called.’ He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead.” He was willing to sacrifice his son, because he knew God would raise him from the dead. The covenant promises of Abraham find their summit in the resurrection; the covenant threats of Moses find their summit in the crucifixion. So the law is simply an addition. Faith is emphasized in Abraham, and repentance is emphasized in Moses.

When you come to the gospels, what do you hear John the Baptist saying? “Repent and believe. Repent and believe. Repent and believe.” You must recognize that you’re under the curse of the Mosaic law, and come in faith to Christ, to receive the blessing of the Abrahamic promise.

Now the law was not only addition, but secondly, the law was insertion. It was inserted temporarily. You see that in verse 19 here: “The law was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator,” we’ll describe more about that. But the law was brought by angels when the law came down on Mount Sinai.

But I want you to notice the end of the verse, “until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.” When God made a promise to Abraham and his seed He was talking about Christ, not just the descendant of Abraham, but the final and ultimate seed Christ. He says that back in verse 16.

So when Christ comes, when Christ comes, the law, the law has served its great purpose. The law was ordained until the seed would come. It was inserted; that means it’s temporary. It had a place, it had a role.

“Until” indicates the law in its Mosaic form, and I’m talking about the external elements of the law, not the moral character of God, which is also revealed in the law; that is eternal. But the unique prescriptions and characteristics of the Mosaic law were only in place until Christ. And when Christ comes, Paul says this, “Don’t let anybody hold you to a feast, a new moon, a Sabbath, taste not, touch not – any rules.” He says to Peter, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat,” which means all the dietary laws are gone. He says, “What is the difference whether you’re circumcised or uncircumcised? It does not matter. Circumcision is nothing. When Christ the reality comes, all those externals are gone.”

So the law is an insertion for a period of time, pointing to Christ. It has as its goal fulfillment in Him. And when He came, what did He say in Matthew 5: He said, “I did not come to break the law, I did not come to set aside the law, I came to” – what? “fulfill the law. Not one jot or one tittle shall in any wise be removed from this law until all is fulfilled. I must fulfill all righteousness.” He came and lived the law perfectly. That’s why Romans 10:4 says, “Christ is the end of the law. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

And even in the day of Jeremiah, Jeremiah’s time, he knew that there was coming another covenant, he knew that. The Spirit of God had revealed that new covenant to Jeremiah, and the most clear revelation of that is in the thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah. Listen to these words: “Behold, days are coming” – verse 31 – declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel.”

So they knew there was a new covenant coming, something that would supersede the Mosaic covenant. It would never supersede the Abrahamic covenant, because that was a covenant of promise; but something that would replace the Mosaic covenant.

“I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt,” – that’s the Mosaic covenant; not like that one – “My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after these days, in the future,” declares the Lord. “I’ll put My law within them and on their I’ll write it; I’ll be their God, they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sins I will remember no more.” Wow. That supersedes the Mosaic. The Mosaic damns you, and the new covenant forgives you.

So they knew there was coming a new covenant. Clearly, that new covenant is, as was the Abrahamic covenant of promise, a covenant of faith, because the whole gospel is, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, not of works.”

David also understood that when the Messiah came, there would not only be a new covenant, there would be a new kingdom; and the Messiah was going to be a reigning king, a reigning monarch. And David also knew that when the Messiah came, there would not only be a new covenant and a new kingdom, there would be a new priesthood. The Mosaic covenant was dependent on a functioning priesthood – sons of Aaron, Levites. It was the priesthood that basically carried out the restraints and restrictions and requirements of the Mosaic law. So there were many, many priests.

But there is coming a day when the Messiah comes. There’ll be no more ceremonies, no more rituals, no more Sabbath laws, no more dietary laws, no more clothing laws, and no more Levitical priesthood. There will be a new covenant, a new kingdom, and a new priesthood. David even foretold that eternal priesthood in Psalm 110:4.

The Old Testament then sees a transfer of the priesthood from the tribe of Levi to a priest out of the tribe of Judah, a nonpriestly tribe. And more than that, a priest after the order of Melchizedek who lived way back in Genesis before Moses. This is a different priesthood. If you have a different priesthood, you must then have a different covenant. You cannot have a new priesthood operating an old covenant.

So when Christ comes, the Mosaic externals are put aside, the Mosaic priesthood is put aside. You have a new covenant, a new covenant with a person who is ratifying that covenant by His blood, who is the King of a new kingdom, and who is the Priest of a new priesthood.

Listen to Hebrews 7. I think this is so fascinating, verse 11: “If perfection was through the Levitical priesthood, what further need would there be for another priest to arise?” The truth of the matter is, the Levitical priesthood couldn’t bring salvation to the people. “If it was perfect, then what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of the law also.” If we have a new priesthood in Christ, a new high priest, then

we have a new covenant. Just a marvelous truth.

It is evident our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests; and it's clear still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek who was a king priest way back in the book of Genesis, not even part of the Levitical priesthood; if we're talking about a priest from Judah who precedes the priests of Moses, then we're talking about a new covenant. Our new priest is a priest forever, a priest forever.

On the one hand, there's a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness; that's the law. For the law made nothing perfect. And on the other hand, there's a bringing in of a better hope; that's the new covenant, through which we draw near to God. Jesus then becomes the guarantee of a better covenant. Better covenant, better priesthood. The changing of the priesthood marks the changing of the law.

So the law was addition to bring repentance alongside faith. The law was insertion as well to carry out the sacrificial system and continue to hold the law before the people for the purposes of separation from the nations around them, for the purpose of explaining the need for a sacrifice, a substitutionary sacrifice for their sin, and of communicating to them the law of God. But when the Messiah came, the law of Moses had reached its end. It is only in place, verse 19, until the seed would come.

Now as we close, a third point – try to go fast – the law as instruction. Now we come into the present time since Christ: the law as instruction.

What role does the law have for us? First of all, listen. Ceremonial law, no role. The ceremonial priesthood, no role. In fact, not only is Christ our High Priest, but we are a kingdom of priests. There's a new covenant in His blood. He's a new King. We are priests, He is our Great High Priest.

So what is the law's purpose? Now we're going to move from the ceremonial law, they have no purpose. Sacrificial law, have no purpose. How do we know the sacrificial law would have ended? Because our Lord, at the time of His death, tore the veil of the temple from top to bottom, and ended the priesthood, and ended that entire temple system; and the Holy of Holies was open to everyone to have free access.

So what's the purpose of the law now? It had a purpose in the Old Testament. It was a hedge separating Israel from the nations around them. It was a bridle, restraining their sin. It was a barrier, preventing them from walking across the lines into transgression. It was a mirror – all these things are biblical images – that showed them their sin and guilt. But it's primary purpose in all those things was to create in their heart a longing for the Redeemer. It's chief task was to show the utter sinfulness of man, his desperate need for the Redeemer, to point them to Christ.

The law is a tutor to lead us to Christ. It teaches us that we're sinful. It teaches us that we are disobedient, lawless transgressors. It teaches us that we are cursed. Makes us aware of our profound guilt. It literally kills us, Paul says that in Romans 7: "When I saw the law, I thought I was alive prior to seeing the true law of God. When I saw it for what it really was, the true moral law of God, it killed me; I died."

The law produces guilt. Okay, we get that. So the law produces guilt, and the law drives us to cry out in repentance, “O God, be merciful to me, a sinner, and forgive me.”

Now once we’ve been saved and the law has done its instruction, it has, as a tutor, led us to Christ, is that it? Now, finally, can we get rid of the law? Well, we’ve gotten rid of the sacrificial system, that’s part of it. We’ve gotten rid of the priesthood, that’s part of it. We’ve gotten rid of the ceremonies and rituals and Sabbath ordinances, that’s part of it.

But there’s one massive part of the law remaining, and that is the moral law. And the moral law is a reflection of the character of God. It’s a reflection of the character of God. So now as a believer, all that’s left for me is the moral law. What should be my relation to that? A simple answer is, “Are there any commandments to believers in the New Testament?” Are there? Yes. Does that give you a hint?

Are there any commandments in the New Testament about what you ought to do and what you ought not to do? Yes. Does God want you to obey Him, to keep His commandments? What is the Christian believer’s relation to the law now? It is instruction to holiness.

Once it was instruction to salvation, now it’s instruction to holiness. It was instruction to salvation for the Jews even in its sacrificial system. It was instruction to salvation to the Gentiles in the fact that it exposed the horrendous character of our sin and put us under the curse, and we had to flee somewhere to find a redeemer to deliver us; and Christ is that Redeemer alone.

But there are some who say, “Well, look, the law brought us to Christ, so it’s done. We’re there. We’re there. And so now we’re under grace, and now we are free in Christ.” This is an old and popular lie that this freedom means we have no obligation to God’s moral law. Very popular stuff, this antinomianism, this libertinism.

They say, “The law is done. The law is void. We’re not under the law, we’re under grace. The law has no part in the Christian believer’s life.” And by the way, this deception has many, many titles, many names.

I’ve been fighting it on dozens and dozens and dozens of fronts for decades. But advocates say this: “To obey God’s moral law out of duty, oh, that’s a sin against grace, that’s a sin against freedom, because it disregards your freedom in Christ. To obey God out of a desire for obedience or even a desire for blessing or reward; that is legalism. That is a sin.”

Can you imagine people in these kinds of churches that are hearing, “If I obey the Lord out of duty or out of a desire to be obedient, I’m sinning”? There’s a trap you can’t escape: “If you don’t obey, you’re sinning; if you do obey, you’re sinning.”

That’s part of the contemporary antinomianism that’s rampant, even in evangelicalism, sometimes called “cross-centered sanctification,” because it wants to tell you that only when you’re swept away with big emotions about Jesus bleeding on the cross or dying on the cross, and you do something good, is it really an acceptable act. Anything done out of duty is unacceptable. I wonder what Paul meant when he said, “I beat my body to bring it into submission, so that in preaching to others I don’t become a castaway myself, disqualified.”

So what is the role of the law in a believer's life? One error is legalism. It says we smuggle the law into the gospel, we smuggle the law into the gospel, and the gospel is polluted with the law. This is the Judaizers' wrong answer, that the law is necessary for salvation.

Another answer is the libertine answer, that the gospel abolishes the law. So now that you're saved, forget the law, you don't have to worry about the law. And by the way, every time I hear somebody teaching this through the years, I just wait patiently; for time and truth go hand-in-hand, to see their whole life implode or explode in a moral catastrophe. And it happens.

To say that salvation requires the law is to oppose grace. To say that sanctification rejects the law is to oppose God's commands. Let me say it a few ways. Opposition to grace damns the non-Christian's soul in a system of works that won't save. It builds up what Christ has destroyed. Opposition to law cripples the Christian's soul, because it denies his need for obedience, and thus it halts sanctification.

Again, opposition to grace damns the non-Christian's soul, opposition to law cripples the Christian's soul, two sides of the same error. In both cases, people are too preoccupied with the law. Legalism separates the law of God from His love and His grace. Antinomianism separates the law of God – listen – from His holiness. And God is not just grace, He's holy. He's not just loving, He's righteous. So whether you are a legalist or a libertine, you have defined your Christian experience by law, by your attitude toward the law. Either you think it's necessary for salvation; or if you think it's not necessary for sanctification, you're defining your relationship to the law; and that is not what salvation is.

Salvation is a relationship to God. Sanctification is a relationship to God. It's not a relationship to the law. I can't be saved by keeping the law, and I will not be sanctified by ignoring the law. If I love God, I love Him for His grace and I love Him for His holiness. I love Him for His grace and I love Him for His holiness. Legalism is banished when we see the truth about God's grace, and we enjoy Him for it. Antinomianism is banished when we see the truth about God's holiness and we enjoy Him for it.

I love God for His grace, but I love Him for His holiness. When David said, "O how I love Your law," he had the right perspective. The Christian life is about your relationship to God, and loving God means loving Him for His grace and love, and His holiness and righteousness. Loving God is the way you live your life, to love Him, and love Him more; and love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love Him for who He is: fully gracious and absolutely holy.

Father, we're grateful for our time this morning in Your Word – profound, wonderful truth. We do want to love You. We don't talk about the law and all these things in order to become preoccupied with them. But I want to know everything You desire. I want to know every command You give, every law that You require, every demand You place on my life, I want to obey that. I want to fulfill that; not because I'm afraid of You, not because I'm trying to earn anything, but because I love You.

Yes, I love You for Your grace and mercy and compassion and forgiveness; but I love You equally for Your holiness and Your righteousness and Your justice. I don't really know if I could love You as God if You weren't absolutely holy and righteous. We love that about You as much as we do Your grace; and we know that it is that absolute holiness and righteousness that caused You to send Your Son to be punished for our sins, because that holiness, that righteousness had to be satisfied with a

just punishment for our sins. And Your grace and love moved that punishment from us to the one who became the curse for us, our Lord Jesus Christ. This is why we love You; this is the God we love and worship.

And now, Lord, work in hearts here this morning. Accomplish Your purpose. Bring people to the knowledge of Christ. Bring people to the knowledge of their own transgressions. And may You bring them, through the power of Your Spirit, penitently before Your throne, crying out for forgiveness in faith in Jesus Christ. Glorify Yourself we pray in the name of our Savior. Amen. Amen.

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